

CODE GEASS

コードギアス

反逆のルージュ

Lelouch

of the Rebellion

STAGE - 4 - ZERO

Original Story by
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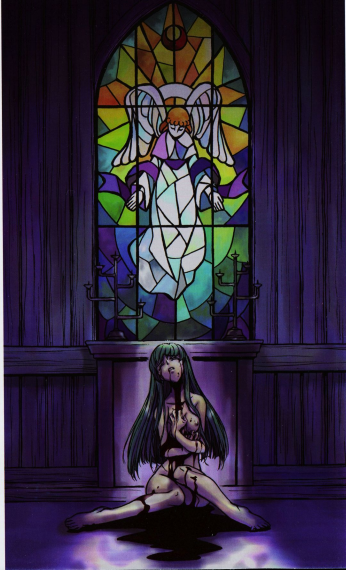
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The situation moves forward.
The expectations of individuals have no bearing on that.
Time flows along.
The struggles of people are no matter.
In that case, Lelouch must be fortunate.
If only because he possesses the power to decide the world's fate himself.
By relying on the absolute power to compel anyone to obey him.
The power of Geass.

 **CODE GEASS** Lelouch
コードギアス of the Rebellion
反逆のルース

4: STAGE -4- ZERO



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STAGE -4- ZERO**

A BANDAI ENTERTAINMENT NOVEL

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WRITTEN BY
COVER ILLUSTRATION BY
COLORING BY
COLOR ILLUSTRATIONS BY

COLORING BY
INSIDE ILLUSTRATIONS BY
COVER/COLOR ILLUSTRATION DESIGN BY
INSIDE DESIGN BY
FINISHES BY
TRANSLATION BY
ENGLISH ADAPTATION BY
ENGLISH BOOK DESIGN BY
COVER PRODUCTION BY
ENGLISH COPY EDITOR
ENGLISH EDITOR
PUBLISHER

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Character Design ©2006 CLAMP

Originally published in Japan in 2008 by KADOKAWA SHOTEN PUBLISHING CO., LTD., Tokyo.
English translation published by Bandai Entertainment Inc. under the license by Sunrise, Inc.

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ISBN-13 978-1-60486-185-0

First BANDAI ENTERTAINMENT printing
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed in Canada

PROFILE

MAMORU IWASA

Born in 1973. Received the 4th Sneaker Award for Most Outstanding Book for "Dancing in the Wind - Legend of the Flying Dragon."

Something you should know about me is that I'm an Aries. This year isn't going to be very lucky. The other day, a friend of mine said these shocking words to me: "Oh, so you're working on the novelization of 'Cogishu.'" "Cogishu"? Is that what the world calls it? I've been calling it "Geass" or "Lelouch."

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MAIN CHARACTERS

CODE GEASS Lelouch of the Rebellion



Lelouch vi Britannia

The eleventh prince of the Holy Empire of Britannia. He was presumed dead after the war. Currently uses the surname, "Lamperouge."



Suzaku Kururugi

The son of the last Japanese prime minister, Gooshe Kururugi. He is a childhood friend of Lelouch and a member of the Britannian Forces.



C.C.

A girl who entered into a contract with Lelouch and gave him the power of Geass. Further details about her are unknown.

ASHFORD PRIVATE ACADEMY

ASHFORD PRIVATE ACADEMY



Milly Ashford

The daughter of the director of the Ashford Private Academy, and the student council president.



Nunnally

Lelouch's little sister. Her legs were injured in the incident that ended their mother's life, and the trauma took away her sight as well.



Shirley Fenette



Rivalz Cardmonde



Nina Einstein



Arthur

CODE GEASS Lelouch of the Rebellion

MAIN CHARACTERS

CODE GEASS: Lelouch of the Rebellion

HOLY EMPIRE OF BRITANNIA



Charles zi Britannia

The 98th Emperor of the Holy Empire of Britannia, one of the most powerful nations in the world. He is Lelouch's and Nunnally's father.



Cornelia li Britannia

The second princess of the Holy Empire of Britannia. She is Euphy's older sister. After Clovis was assassinated, Cornelia came to Area 11 to take over as vicerey.



Lloyd Asplund

The chief of the Britannian Forces' Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps. He is Suzaku's boss and loves the Lancelot more than anything else.



Euphemia li Britannia

The third princess of the Holy Empire of Britannia. She is only 16 years old, but serves as the sub-vicerey for Area 11. She is known as "Euphy" for short.



Jeremiah Gottwald

A soldier in the Britannian Forces. After Clovis' death, he served as an administrative ruler, but was demoted after the infamous Orange Incident.



Cecile Croomy

The chief operator of the Britannian Forces' Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps. Her influence over Lloyd is immeasurable.

THE BLACK KNIGHTS HOLY EMPIRE OF BRITANNIA

THE BLACK KNIGHTS



Zero

The leader of the Black Knights. His face is always hidden behind a mask, and not even the other Black Knights know his identity.



Kaname Ohgi

Second in line in the Black Knights under Zero. His meek, amiable personality makes him popular among its members. He is a former teacher.

Kyoshiro Tohdoh

Former lieutenant in the Japanese military. He commanded the only battle that Japan won in their war with Britannia. He was recruited into the Black Knights for his supreme skills. He knew Suzaku when he was a young boy.



Kallen Stadtfeld

Her mother is Japanese, and Kallen's Japanese name is Kallen Kurosaki. She is the ace pilot of the Guren Mk-II.



Diethard Ried

A Britannian who joined the Black Knights. Ohgi is a little suspicious of his intentions.



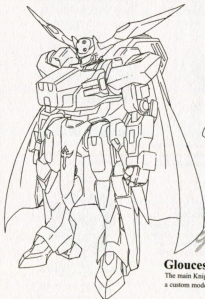
CODE GEASS: Lelouch of the Rebellion

MAIN CHARACTERS

CODE GEASS: The Lancelot of the Rebellion

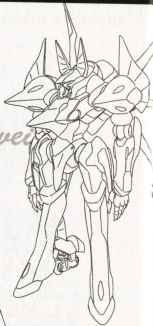
Gawain

A prototype Knightmare developed by a team led by Lloyd. It is equipped with many new abilities such as the float system, the Shadow Cannon, and an electron analysis system known as the Druid System. Because of it, the unit is much larger than other Knightmares. To ease up the control of the unit, there are seats for two pilots.



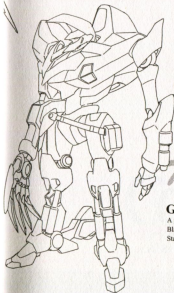
Gloucester Cornwallia Custom

The main Knightmare of the Britannian Forces. This is a custom model made for Cornelia.



Lancelot

The 7th generation Knightmare Frame developed by the Britannian Forces' Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps. It's still in the testing stages, but possesses great power. The pilot is Suzaku Kururugi.



Guren Mk-II

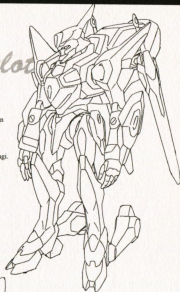
A pure Japanese Knightmare. The main weapon the Black Knights use to fight against Britannia. Kallen Stadfield is its pilot.

KNIGHTMARE FRAME

CODE GEASS: The Lancelot of the Rebellion

Lancelot

Type-02



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Interval

April 1999, Britannia

Someone was crying in the shade of the rustling trees.

A tender spring breeze blew and the sun shone brightly over the gentle green hillside. Every living thing seemed to sing with the joy of life, grateful for God's blessing. Yet there it was, that melancholic, sad sobbing.

A young man was making his way over the hillside, admiring the sky above. He walked toward the forest at the base of the hill, careful not to step on any of the young wildflowers peppering the grass. He entered the forest's shade and kept on walking, searching for the source of the plaintive weeping.

Finally, he found the maker of the sound under a big chinquapin tree. She was a striking-looking girl with somewhat reddish hair. The girl, who appeared no more than ten years old, was sitting on a tree root, holding her knees, face cupped in her arms. The shoulders of the white dress rose and fell with her trembling sobs. When she noticed the young man's footsteps, she looked up. A bit of surprise registered in her red, swollen eyes.

"Darlton..." she said as she wiped her wet cheeks and tried to stand up. She was a strong-willed girl. She never let anyone see her cry, which was why she'd hidden in the woods in the first place. The young man, Andreas Darlton, knew what that meant.

"I just can't win," said Darlton with a smile, before she could stand up.

"Huh?" the girl sniffled. Darlton continued. "I escape from the castle for a little fresh air and who do I run into besides the princess? Now I'm in trouble for sure! It's too much to ask that I only be let

off with a warning...My poor mother will be so disappointed. She was so happy that I finally was promoted to captain."

The girl, not quite knowing what to do, looked at him and asked awkwardly, "You didn't...come here to get me?"

"What are you talking about? I came here to take a nap," Darlton answered cheerfully.

"Of course, if you tell my boss on me, I'll never be able to nap again! I'll be too busy finding ways to make ends meet. Oh man, I'll really be in trouble then! As you can see, I could never be anything but a soldier."

The girl stared at him, wide-eyed and innocent. Darlton's smile reflected in her eyes. She suddenly looked down and said indignantly, "I wouldn't tell on you. I don't like being sneaky like that."

"Forgive me, Princess Cornelia. Well, then I will forget about my guard duty and enjoy the afternoon nap I had planned," Darlton said, taking a seat on the same tree root as the second princess of the Holy Britannian Empire, Cornelia li Britannia. He reclined against the sturdy tree trunk and closed his eyes peacefully. Cornelia glanced at him from the corner of her eye but didn't say anything to stop him.

Sunlight sifting down through the canopy played over the two. They heard birds calling to each other playfully off in the trees. Birds flapping their wings on the tree branches and their airy chirps were the only sounds in the otherwise still forest. After those tapered off, the silence grew deep. Suddenly, the princess blurted, "I am not wanted."

Darlton didn't answer. He didn't even open his eyes. Perhaps it was because he acted so distantly, as if he had no relation to the girl, that she was able to show a part of herself that she normally kept hidden. She was free to speak her inner thoughts, things that were forbidden to speak in the castle for a princess of Britannia. She was broaching a matter of great concern to her and he knew not to interrupt.

"I'm not wanted," Cornelia said once again. Cornelia buried her face, red and puffy with tears, back into her lap and continued, "I...I will never be the kind of 'princess' that my mother talks about. I don't like singing, painting, or playing the piano. I like swords, but mother says that they only lead to unhappiness..." She started to tear up once again. "Mother likes cute girls, like the Brookner and Rozen girls, but I'll never be like that. So, she doesn't want me..."

She couldn't finish because of her tears. She gripped her knees tightly and tried desperately to keep from bawling; however, her emotions refused to back down and her shoulders trembled madly. Sniffles came from the gap between her arms where her face was buried.

Darlton remained silent. He didn't think there was much for him to say. Even if he spoke, his words would be nothing but empty platitudes. Judging from how important it seemed to her not to appear weak, meaningless words of comfort would be the last thing she wanted.

What can I do to help her? There must be something.

He did the only thing he could, which was listen to the confessions of a princess who could never speak her mind inside the castle walls.

Only a few months later, Darlton's image of her sobbing face was overwritten when he saw a dynamite smile light up her face.

"Darlton, Darlton!" she came running towards him with her eyes twinkling, having found Darlton at work in the castle. Nothing of her previous gloom was evident in the way her lovely white dress flapped about in the sparkling morning light. "Mother is having a baby!" she exclaimed.

Darlton, who'd already heard, lowered his head toward the princess panting with exertion at his feet. "Congratulations, Your

Highness," he said. "I'm sure the baby will be as beautiful as the Emperor and the Empress."

"Yep!" the princess said vigorously. "Mother will be relieved. I'm sure she'll be the kind of princess my mother always wanted me to be."

This gave Darlton a wry smile. "We don't know if it's going to be a princess, yet. The baby could be a boy, Princess Cornelia."

"Oh...right. Hmum, I wonder which the baby will be? Well, I don't care if it's going to be my brother or my sister. Either way, I'm going to take care of it and keep it safe, just like my mother. Just like Lady Marianne! I'll be strong enough that I can take care of her forever! That way, Mother will be happy even if I can't be girly myself, right?"

"You're going to make a great sister, Your Highness."

"Really? Do you really think so, Darlton?"

"Yes," Darlton assured her.

As it turned out, the baby was a girl. The father of the baby, Charles zi Britannia, the Emperor of the Holy Empire of Britannia, named her Euphemia. Her sister Cornelia called her Euphy for short.

Sixteen years later, the sisters became the viceroy and sub-viceroy of Area 11, formerly known as Japan.

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STAGE-4: 1-EXCEPTION

[Special Areas]

Special Area refers to an area under special administration. In the Holy Empire of Britannia, most are under the direct supervision of the Emperor himself; however, there are some which are governed by those with responsibilities and authority approaching the Emperor's. There are many types of Special Areas, such as a Special Strategy Area, a Special Finance Area, and a Special Technology Area. Unlike the nearby residential neighborhoods in which ordinary Britannians conduct their lives, each Special Area has its own independent political system and charter, and therefore, many are known to be eccentric. Mysteriously, the purposes of some Special Areas are never announced. There is a rumor that those types of areas have something to do with ruins. Britannia has never made an official statement about the rumor.

November 2017, Area 11

For a late fall day, it was uncharacteristically warm.

Cornelia li Britannia, viceroy of Area 11, looked up at the high skylight of the audience chamber of the government bureau. The room was walled with large glass panels and the blue sky beyond them seemed to stretch into eternity. The windows operated on an automated system; her bodyguards had asked her if she wanted them open, but she had answered that it was not necessary. Currently, she regretted that decision. There are times when fresh air sounds like a good idea, especially those times when you feel like your brain is in a rut.

Cornelia returned her attention to the room. A number of men saluted her from the red carpet below her raised platform. They were all well-built in military officers' uniforms. To a man, they were pilots of Knightmare Frames, the most powerful mobile weapon of modern times.

"Thank you for coming all this way," Cornelia said as she took a seat on the viceroy's chair. She addressed the men clearly and solemnly. "With you Glaston Knights joining us from the homeland, our forces are finally beginning to look as they should. I'm sure you're all aware of the situation in Area 11. Lend us your hands and join your foster father, General Darlton, in our crusade."

The men inclined their heads politely. Cornelia gave a quick glance at Darlton, who bobbed his head slightly. As Cornelia had said, these men were Darlton's adoptive sons. He'd trained each of them, and each was worthy of reporting to Cornelia directly.

Darlon himself was Cornelia's right-hand man, and along with her private knight, Guilford, these men could be called Cornelia's elite guards. Their loyalty toward Cornelia surpassed their loyalty even toward the Emperor.

Always composed, Darlon raised his head confidently. Cornelia met his gaze as she addressed the Glaston Knights. "I know you have just arrived, but I have an order. My brother, the chancellor of the Empire, His Highness Prince Schneizel, who has been here in Area 11, is leaving at 1100 hours today. Provide security for him during the farewell ceremony and thereafter. As far as his flagship Avalon is concerned, the ship will remain in this area to undergo adjustments by ASEEC's technical team. Keep that in mind and take adequate security measures."

Everybody bowed one more time. Immediately after, the small squad exited the area in a crisp manner. Their intense formality couldn't have been the cause for Cornelia's irritation, but after they left, Cornelia sighed in exhaustion, which was very unlike her.

She slumped into her chair and stared up at the skylight. Now that she and Darlon were alone, he murmured, "Are you sure everything's alright?"

"Is what alright?" asked Cornelia listlessly.

"The ceremony. His Highness Schneizel asked us not to make a big deal."

"But, we can't send off the chancellor of the Empire without a brief ceremony from the forces. Not even if it's a spur of the moment decision."

"Yes, but..."

"Besides, if he plans to use a transport other than the Avalon, then it is our duty to provide security at least until he passes this area's maritime border. The ceremony is just icing on the cake. Of course, I will be there this time, since I wasn't there to welcome him." Cornelia rattled off unemotionally.

Darlon remained attentive, though he lowered his eyes and spent some time with his thoughts. Cornelia had been acting that way for a while. Ever since the Kyushu Incident, Area 11 had enjoyed a brief period of tranquility. Though it was a positive change, the viceroy didn't seem to care. Far be it from Cornelia to neglect her duties or act unreasonable, but it was clear to someone who had served her as long as Darlon had that something was throwing off her mental rhythm. Not surprisingly, Darlon was pretty sure he could guess the cause.

"If it's a brief ceremony," Darlon broke the silence and said, "I'd like to keep the press out. As we've seen recently, they can't be fully trusted."

"Mm-hmm..." Cornelia nodded noncommittally. "Fine. Let Andover handle the actual guard duties. They'll rendezvous with a flagship from the mainland halfway. There shouldn't be any problem if you let him take charge and preside over the transfer."

"Certainly."

"Oh, and..." Cornelia's tone hardened as she said, "What's on the sub-viceroy's schedule for today?" The fact she called her sister by title and not name showed just how Cornelia felt. Darlon imagined his heart was donning armor as he replied evenly, "The sub-viceroy is on vacation today."

"Vacation?" Cornelia's eyebrow twitched, though she remained focused on the skylight. Then she glanced at Darlon, and it was clear from her expression that she was on her way to feeling the complete opposite of warm and fuzzy. "On the very day our brother goes back to the mainland?"

"It is unfortunate," Darlon replied, "but you said yourself his departure was rather sudden. She requested this day off quite some time ago."

"Still..."

"Additionally, the sub-viceroy has already been alerted to His Highness' return."

"So?"

"She said that although she would like to see him off, she couldn't promise due to a matter that she had to attend to. In any case, it's going to be a brief ceremony. It shouldn't be a problem if she can't make it."

"....."

Cornelia didn't say anything. Darlton continued, "I understand that she visited Prince Schneizel last night to give her personal farewell."

Cornelia looked as if she wanted to gag but she knew Darlton was right. As long as the ceremony was not a formal one, her little sister, Euphemia li Britannia, also known as the sub-vice-roy of Area 11, was not obligated to participate in it. Besides the girl had already given her regards to her brother in person; her obligation as a family member was fulfilled. As such, Cornelia had no authority to say anything about the situation.

Cornelia's dour expression remained as she asked Darlton angrily, "And just what is she doing anyway? What's so important she can't see our brother off?"

"I wouldn't know, but it must be something important if she insisted on it," he answered.

"Can you be sure of that? Lately, she hasn't seemed to be able to distinguish between business and pleasure," muttered Cornelia. Darlton sighed.

How miserable, he thought, but no matter how close he was to them, there was nothing he could do about the growing cold war between the two sisters.



A likeness of the most powerful person on earth was displayed on the giant wall monitor. He wore rich garments and held a truly regal bearing. He was, in fact, a tall man in person, but his imperial

airs made him look even more imposing. His name was Charles zi Britannia, the 98th Emperor of the Holy Empire of Britannia.

A young man supplicated on bended knee below the monitor. The Emperor spoke coolly to the man. "I've read your future strategy plan for the far east." The young man bowed his head even lower. His face bore some of the same aristocracy that the Emperor's did. He was the second prince of the Empire, also known as Chancellor Schneizel el Britannia. "You plan to control the nation with harmony, rather than arms. How very like you, Schneizel."

"Thank you for your kind words," the prince responded calmly, despite the fact that his father very probably was mocking his political strategy. "For the time being, the Chinese Federation has no way of repelling us either militarily or diplomatically. We could choose to take advantage of that and enforce our military oppression, but in the long run it wouldn't be advantageous."

Just three weeks prior, the far east's superpower, the Chinese Federation, had made a huge blunder at the Fukuoka Base Incident, an insurgency led by the refugee politician, Atsushi Sawasaki. The Chinese Federation supported Sawasaki and won the Fukuoka base, but Sawasaki's troops experienced total defeat at the hands of Cornelia's Britannian Forces. The ringleaders were captured and trotted out as a warning to other nations to stay out of Britannia's domestic political issues.

The Federation insisted that the troops sent were not their official ones, but private volunteer troops instead. But that claim was completely unsubstantiated. In addition, the fact the Japanese living in Area 11 did not support Sawasaki and the Chinese Federation's actions completely surprised the rebels. A revolutionary movement without public support was fruitless resistance.

"Many intellectuals are criticizing the Chinese Federation for sending so-called volunteer soldiers here as a pretense for invasion. Still, if we press the matter too hard, we might end up with a

treacherous situation on our hands. They'd be backed into a corner and might end up abandoning the concession of Siberia altogether. Not to mention the backlash we'd suffer if we ended up driving them to nestle up to the EU to mend their past relationship. Instead, I think that we should soften the level of isolation, which would give us an upper hand diplomatically, then attempt to obtain stability in the region."

"You're saying that Britannia should focus its military power on the EU and their Operation Bell, and not the Chinese Federation? Am I correct?"

"Exactly."

"What are our chances of victory?"

"This is not official, but, more than half of the High Eunuchs support our nation's proposal."

"They would sell their master to save themselves, would they?" smirked the Emperor.

"They're easy to manipulate. In any case, they are essential to move the Chinese Federation," Schneizel added, to which the Emperor said derisively, "They've lost their integrity. They used to fight with pride for absolute equality for all in the name of their Emperor. Well, they're only human."

The grin disappeared as he looked directly at Schneizel. "You may proceed. You can relate the details to me after your return. I have no problem with the general outline. I trust you to carry out these plans, Schneizel."

"I'm honored. You have my gratitude."

"And..." the Emperor paused for a moment, "I've relayed the message to the relevant departments regarding the matter you submitted under the Area 11 sub-viceroy's name. You may use the Emperor's name from now on. Proceed as you see fit."

"Thank you again for your kindness. There are no words to express my gratitude, Father," Schneizel said.

"Just out of curiosity, was that proposal one of your strategies?"

This time, it was Schneizel who paused for a moment. He closed his eyes then looked up, smiling. "That one was submitted by Euphy. I thought that it was a fine idea and I promised her I'd support it all the way. It's been seven years already since the Far East Incident. That region is no longer in need of bloodshed."

"Hmph. Well, we'll leave it at that."

They discussed a few more business items before terminating the call. Schneizel bowed as the monitor fizzled to black. Once he confirmed that he was no longer connected to the Emperor, Schneizel straightened up. Relief washed over his delicate features. He turned around, saying, "As usual, he is so tiresome. Still, I could have been speaking to his body double and not my father."

Schneizel gazed at the men in arms in the room who were all still at full attention and saluting. The person leading the squad was the one with a general's badge, General Bartley Asprios. After receiving permission to stand at ease, he asked Schneizel a burning question. "That was his body double?"

"Who knows? It's not out of the question," Schneizel replied nonchalantly and started on his way. Somewhat hurriedly, Bartley trailed after Schneizel's fluttering cape. "Everything I had to do in this region is now done. Bartley, I thank you for your help."

"I'm honored to be at your service," the general deferred.

"May I count on you to take care of the rest?"

"By all means." They walked through a dull gray hallway until they reached a moving walkway. They boarded the walkway, headed for heavy blast doors.

"However, Your Highness, are you sure you're okay with it?"

"With what?"

"Well...about Kamine Island. It wasn't reported to the Emperor at all..."

"The results...well, they simply weren't good enough to report," Schneizel said with a grin. When they reached the doors, sensors conducted a bioscan. After matching the two men with its database, the doors opened. "Besides, even a private channel can be

tapped or intercepted. Once I'm back in the homeland, I'll speak to the Emperor in person on the matter."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Schneizel and Bartley entered into a research laboratory that had a dome-shaped ceiling. Several lab technicians in white coats halted their work in front of various stations and bowed to the two men. Schneizel raised his hand to acknowledge them. He stopped in front of a large fluid-filled capsule connected to many tubes. The huge cylindrical capsule was filled with a semi-transparent culture solution in which the dark silhouette of a person could be seen floating. "This one is going well, it seems," said Schneizel, standing in front of the capsule. Bartley straightened himself up proudly.

"It was fortunate thorough data had been gathered on the original before the Shinjuku Incident. It's not the perfect replica but he's still valuable as the prototype for the next step."

"How about the President of the Council?" Schneizel inquired.

"He seems satisfied with the dummy data we sent for the time being."

"Hmph. How unlike them. Normally, they'd pester us until they dragged it out of us," said Schneizel as he looked up the capsule. It could have been a reflection from the light of the capsule but his gaze held an unusually sharp glint, rather different from his usual diplomatic amiability. What reflected harshly on his eyes was the shadow of the human-shaped thing suspended in the capsule's fluid.

"Code R, huh...? Clovis, I'll carry on your wish. Don't worry." Some would have immediately noticed who was in the capsule. It was a Britannian knight who'd become acting consul following the death of the late Viceroy Clovis. The man in the capsule was the spitting image of none other than Jeremiah Gotwald, last reported missing after the battle with the Black Knights at Narita.

Noon had come and gone. After seeing off her brother on his way back to the homeland, Cornelia returned to her office at the government bureau. What awaited her there was the usual mound of paperwork.

"When do you need them by?" she asked a secretary.

"By the end of the day today, if possible, Your Highness," he replied.

"Very well. I'll finish them by the evening."

The secretary bowed as he exited the room. Cornelia spent some time immersing herself in her administrative paperwork. She looked over each department's reports, various applications and forms, signed the ones she approved, placed the rejected ones into one stack and the ones which required resubmission into another. Though she was renowned for her accomplishments on the battlefield, she was also a capable administrator who recognized the importance of all the viceroy's duties. It was a boring task but she never cut corners in her work. She believed that commanders who skimmed on their duties would encourage laziness and disobedience in their subordinates.

Cornelia finished the work in a matter of two hours then told the secretary on standby in the other room that she was returning to her private quarters. The night before, she'd been up almost the whole night. Pulling an all-nighter once or twice wouldn't hurt, but making a pattern of it would. Also, the thought of a hot shower sounded pretty good, now that she'd dealt with her paperwork and her brother's farewell ceremony.

"Certainly, Your Highness," the secretary said. "I will send a servant to your room."

"Yes, thank you," Cornelia said as she left the office and headed to her personal room in the rear of headquarters. She took the elevator down and entered into the restricted access area, which could be entered by special permission only. She proceeded through the silent hallway. She noticed someone short and petite

standing at attention, waiting for her in front of the door. Cornelia tilted her head in puzzlement.

The person was a young female army cadet. That was not a problem, per se. Generally, Cornelia didn't keep private servants in her quarters; therefore, female cadets were sent from the military school to take care of her private needs, including changing her clothes. Rather, Cornelia was puzzled because the girl was new to her. The girl, whose uniform was obviously too large on her, saluted.

"I'm Marika Soresi of the Area 11 Military Academy Land Battle Mobile Operation Department," she said. "I am replacing my senior, Relinah Velgamon...I mean, Cadet Relinah Velgamon, who has been transferred to the Air Battle advance course."

"Fine," said Cornelia with a nod. She now had a vague recollection of someone mentioning the change last week. She'd been so busy dealing with the aftermath of the Sawasaki Incident for the past several weeks that she had forgotten about it.

"I am honored to be chosen to serve to you, Your Highness Viceroy Cornelia. It is my pleasure to serve you to my utmost ability and I am at your disposal," the girl rattled off an introductory speech she seemed to have memorized.

She can't be much more than fourteen years old, mused Cornelia. A light smattering of freckles across her cheeks made her look even younger, as did the fact that she looked impossibly nervous about the whole ordeal. She had probably steeled herself for this day and moment, determined to succeed. *Well, of course,* Cornelia thought. *I'm not the friendliest person one could hope for as their superior. It doesn't help that I'm royalty. Anyone would be scared.*

"Yes, a pleasure to meet you as well, Cadet Marika," said Cornelia, hoping her words were infused with a bit more warmth than she was used to giving.

"Yes, Your Highness!" the girl responded, still tense. She opened the doors and Cornelia entered, shrugging her shoulders so slightly that the girl didn't notice.

The hot shower indeed soothed her tired body. Cornelia finished the shower and came out of the bathroom to find the girl standing overly stiff next to a fresh uniform laid on the bed.

"Shall I take care of your hair, Your Highness?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. Would you?" replied Cornelia.

"Yes, Your Highness." As soon as Cornelia sat down in front of the dresser, the girl served her a steaming cup of tea. Cornelia gave her a quizzical look. The girl gasped and said dolefully, "Eh, um...I heard that you worked late last night and..." she blushed as if she was a little girl who'd been caught doing something wrong. "I was hoping it would help you relax. But...I mean...am I crossing the line as a servant?"

"Not at all," Cornelia said, with a subtle but genuine smile this time and took the offered cup and saucer. "That's considerate of you," Cornelia said sincerely, which made the girl's face light up.

"I understand! Thank you, Your Highness." She looked even younger when she smiled. She didn't seem like a soldier at all, but that wasn't what struck Cornelia. This Marika looked like someone but Cornelia couldn't place who.

The girl started to fix Cornelia's hair with a hair dryer in one hand and a comb in the other. Her handling was awkward, but her effort and eagerness made Cornelia feel good. The aroma of the tea tickled her nose, chasing away the unpleasant feelings she'd been dragging around ever since the conversation with Darlton that morning.

"You're in the Mobile Operations department?" Cornelia asked, feeling nice, which was a rare event. "Do you want to be a pilot? A Knightmare pilot?"

"Oh, yes, Your Highness," the girl said stuttered. Cornelia knew the girl was stressed, but would she just get over it? The girl continued reverently. "Well...that's why I am so happy to be able to serve you, Your Highness, because you are the best Knightmare pilot in Britannia."

"Why thank you," Cornelia was forced to smile as she continued, "but I don't know about being the best pilot. There are many knights that are far more skilled than I in Britannia. Look at the Knights of the Round that guard my father...I mean, the Emperor. That whole group is composed of superb knights."

"But," the girl said, "Your Highness, you are a woman, like me."

"There are female knights in the Rounds. Although we've never battled against each other, so nobody knows who's more skilled."

"Yes, but still! Your Highness, I have admired you for a long time—" when the girl realized what she'd said, she gasped and almost dropped the dryer on the floor.

"Is that right? You admire me?" Cornelia chuckled.

"I—I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude..."

"Don't worry. I'm flattered, Cadet Marika."

"Oh my!" the girl blushed. Cornelia saw this in the mirror and chuckled again. Cornelia finally realized that the girl hadn't been intimidated out of fear, but out of admiration. She also realized who this girl reminded her of: herself in the past. Her mannerisms used to be very similar back when she was working hard to pursue her own hero, also a Nightmare pilot.

After a while, Marika finished with Cornelia's hair, cleaned up the tea cup Cornelia had finished drinking out of, and helped the woman put her uniform on. "By the way," Cornelia began as she threaded her arm through the shirt the girl held, "it's a great achievement that you have already finished the elementary training course at your age. You also must have excellent grades to have been selected to work for me."

It was a rule of thumb that the female cadet with the top grades in the intermediate training courses was selected to serve Cornelia.

"No, I'm not that..." the girl blushed again. "I'm far from achieving what my brother has."

"Oh, you have a brother in training as well?" Cornelia inquired.

"Oh, no, he already became a Knight."

"Is that right? Do I know him?" asked Cornelia casually, but this made the girl pause mid-reach for the jacket on the bed.

"Is something the matter?"

"It's nothing," the girl regained her composure and opened the jacket. As she placed it over Cornelia's shoulders, straining on her tiptoes, she murmured, "Um, my brother's name is Kewell Soresi."

"Yes, I've heard that name. I believe he was a prominent A Grade pilot prior to my arrival here..." suddenly Cornelia jerked, fingers freezing over the fine buttons of her jacket. She twirled around to look at the upset girl standing behind her. Marika's nervous energy seemed drained away. Her eyes closed. After a moment, she said in a metered tone, "Yes. He died in the battle at Narita. I heard that he was killed by the Black Knights' new model Nightmare...I'm sorry that he couldn't be of help to you. I would like to apologize on behalf of my late brother."

Her voice was so steady it hurt Cornelia to gaze into the girl's eyes and see the small gasp that elicited. She stepped forward and put her hand on the shoulder of the petite girl.

"I'm sorry..." she said quietly. The girl shook her head, saying, "No..." Cornelia thought that she saw tears in the corners of Marika's eyes but chose to ignore them. That was her way of showing respect to the girl's stoic bravery.

There were other words to be said and other promises to be made.

The underground storage space was silent. Gloucesters on standby filled the space directly underneath the government bureau. The machines used by the viceroys' elite guards were the only ones kept

there. Storage of the other Gloucesters and Sutherlands was split between nearby posts.

The machine stored all the way in the back was Cornelia's personal machine. Since it was the commander's unit, it had a different operating system, though its exterior was in the same uniform purple color as the rest.

This was where Cornelia found herself after her shower. Instead of returning to her office, she went down to storage and looked up her beloved machine.

"I wish you the best of fortune in every battle," Marika had said. Cornelia was a bit overwhelmed by the girl's admiration. She wasn't so immature that she feared failing to live up to the girl's expectations. Not at all. Cornelia was well aware of the fact that she has not been able to live up to all of the public's admiration and expectations. Including the Sawasaki Incident, the situation in Area 11 had even disappointed Cornelia's own expectations.

There was so much trouble—Zero, the Black Knights, NAC, and the other anti-government resistance groups. *How much Britannian blood has been shed on this land where I ascended to viceroy?* Stable government was built on sacrifice so it was the responsibility of the commander to bear the burden of the means to that end. Yet, sometimes, the weight felt extra heavy.

Cornelia sighed but it was so small that she barely noticed it herself. Then, she extended her hand to the control console in front of the Gloucester. She operated the touch panel and selected a virtual simulation. She didn't have anything else scheduled that day. Darlton had suggested in the morning that she rest. At the time, she chafed against the idea but her current mood was telling her that if she returned to work she'd only stress out her subordinates. It would be better for everyone if she did some battle simulations instead. After all, she'd been too busy lately and it had kept her away from the Knightmare.

The simulation panel booted up and Cornelia started punching in the strategy criteria. Once that was done, she opened

the cockpit of the Gloucester and grabbed the start-up key. Right as she was about to get in, she heard someone calling her name.

"Cornelia!" Guilford called hurriedly. "It's Princess Euphemia...!"

Hearing the name immediately soured her mood in a way that it never used to. For most of her life, it was a name that made Cornelia brighten up. The name had made Cornelia who she was today.

"What's she doing now?" Cornelia said harshly, spinning around.

The original broadcast had ended but the recorded news footage played over and over on the television.

"I am Euphemia, sub-viceroy of Area 11 of the Holy Empire of Britannia," proclaimed the girl on the screen, who was indeed a rather casually dressed Euphemia, third princess of the Empire. The backdrop lacked the usually formality of a royal announcement as well, as it seemed she was outside a school.

"There is something of great consequence that I wish to tell you all today," said Euphemia with the supreme confidence of one who has internalized great responsibility. "I, Euphemia li Britannia hereby declare the formation of the Specially Administrated Zone of Japan!"

Something made a clanking sound. Guilford gasped and turned in the direction of the sound. It was the Gloucester's start-up key hitting the floor. The fair-complexioned hand that had dropped it was trembling.

"Within the Specially Administrated Zone of Japan, Elevens will be permitted to call themselves Japanese. Restrictions against Elevens and specials rights for Britannians will no longer exist in this zone. It will be a place where Elevens and Britannians live side-by-side as equals!" Guilford stiffened in preparation for an explosion of rage from his princess.

"Do you hear me Zero? I don't care about your past or who you are under that mask. I beg you, join us in creating this Special Zone of freedom! Zero, help me build a new future within Britannia. A place for everyone!"

Despite Guilford's readiness and many of his past near death experiences, the prince's thunderous fury made him cringe. "What is she doing?!" Cornelia roared, banging her fists against the console, which cracked in two.

2

The most questionable part was Schneizel's involvement.

After Schneizel received Euphemia's plan for the establishment of a Specially Administrated Zone, he showed total agreement and support, and laid the groundwork with the government offices in the homeland. Meanwhile, he alerted the viceroy to none of this. Anyone who said he'd gone behind Cornelia's back to further Euphemia's plan would be right.

Of course, he had reasons for acting that way. In her proposal, Euphemia specified the area would be around Mt. Fuji; the way she stated it was vague, but the specific area was to be the F-208 section of the foothills of Mt. Fuji, also known as the Fuji Administrative Zone. This sector was home to many refineries of sakuradite, the top mineral resource of Area 11—making the matter more complex. Sakuradite, used in the manufacturing of Knighmares, was in extreme demand. Considering that seventy percent of the world's sakuradite was under Area 11 soil, control of the resource couldn't be monopolized by one colonial area. In fact, not just the Fuji Administrative Zone, but more than half of all Specially Administrated Zones containing sakuradite-related facilities were under direct jurisdiction of the Britannian homeland, not Cornelia's Area 11 government.

For the sake of maintaining public order, the security forces in those areas were maintained by the Area 11 government; however, administrative authority lay with the homeland. Although these Administrative Zones were located within Area 11, they were under the direct supervision of Charles zi Britannia, the Emperor of the Holy Empire of Britannia, as well as Chancellor Schneizel, and not under the control of the Area 11 viceroy. In other words, the Emperor and his subordinate, Schneizel, had no formal obligation to ask for legal approval from Cornelia on administrative decisions affecting that land.

Still, just because it was legally within in their bounds to do as they pleased, that didn't make it morally sound. At the very least, the viceroy should have been informed. Schneizel's actions could easily be seen as a scheme to separate Euphemia and Cornelia, metaphorically pouring oil on the flame of their cold war.

Despite Schneizel's questionable actions, the one most deserving of criticism was Euphemia herself. Euphemia was sure that her proposal had been relayed to her sister through Schneizel. That she didn't deliver the news of the proposal herself was problematic, but in declaring the establishment of the Special Zone on television without having confirmed that fact was even more reckless. Now that it had been made public, the statement couldn't be retracted. Even if the sisters were emotionally volatile toward each other at the moment, their private fight and the administration of public policy should have remained separate. As sub-viceroy, Euphemia was obligated to act as a public authority figure. She did have approval from the Emperor on the proposal; however, she lacked anything beyond that, such as a timeline for the proposal's announcement and implementation. Though she'd come up with the plan, the land still was under the administration of the homeland and she far overstepped her authority with her proclamation.

Even those issues was no longer the main problem. Something else was infuriating to Cornelia about Euphemia's declaration.

Immediately, she called Euphemia into her office and berated her sister, who finally learned Cornelia knew nothing of the plan.

The night had already fallen on the town outside the window.

"So, you want to create a settlement at the base of Mt. Fuji where Britannians and Elevens can live equally, do you? Irritated as I am, it's something our Father and brother Schneizel approved and I have no say in it," Cornelia said in a menacingly diplomatic tone from her office chair. Euphemia looked wan, having been showered with rage she wasn't used to receiving from her older sister. Darlton and Guilford stood nearby with stern expressions.

"I'll let slide that you and Schneizel went behind my back. I'll even let slide that you proclaimed the establishment of a Special Zone to the people of Area 11, where I govern, but..." Cornelia clenched her fist on top of the desk. "What did you say at the end, Euphy? We'd forgive Zero for his offenses and let him join the Special Zone? Are you insane?" Cornelia's fiery gaze pierced Euphemia. Anger like that would have made an ordinary citizen break down and fervently apologize. Euphemia, though, was a pure-blooded Britannian imperial and, as such, she managed to keep looking at her older sister. Her fair face was firm with determination.

"We don't have the power to win over the Japanese people. Zero's support is essential. Besides the purpose of the Special Zone is to create a place where Britannians and Japanese can live hand in hand, so we should put away our past grudges—"

"Don't be naive!!" Cornelia swung her arm so wildly that she hit a vase on the desk. It fell to the floor and broke into pieces with a sickening crash. Guilford flinched a bit and Darlton moved to calm the princess down, saying, "Your Highness..."

She wasn't interested in his platitudes at the moment. "You two keep out of this! I'm speaking to the sub-viceoy!" Cornelia's

furious eyes caught Euphemia again. "Listen, Euphy. Zero is a criminal and a murderer. Do you know how many Britannians have been killed or injured because of him? Yet, you say he's forgiven because you said so? Your audacity is getting out of control. I never gave you permission to do something like this!"

Euphemia's cheeks flushed but her brow furrowed. Cornelia's ferocious scolding had ignited Euphemia's rebellious side, fueled by the flames of their long-standing ideological conflict. "If you would like to talk about bloodshed, my sister, then look at what Britannia did to Japan. Many more of them have died than us, if you look at the big picture, and so—"

"Euphemia li Britannia!" Cornelia yelled as she smashed her fist against the desk. "Are you Japanese or Britannian?"

"I'm a Britannian, of course, sister."

"So you know that. You are also the sub-viceoy of Area 11 and that means that you are responsible for administering and upholding Britannian law. Laws are the foundation of order. How are we supposed to maintain order if a person in an official position bends the laws? Many have been prosecuted for crimes much lighter than what Zero has done. What do you have to say to those people?"

"I'm not bending any laws!" Euphemia shouted back. "Are you trying to insult me? I do know how important laws are."

"Yet you'd commit a felony by effectively pardoning Zero's crimes."

"Yes, I understand. That's why I'm planning to use the 'Privilege of Exemption from Royalty'."

Silence passed through the room, like the eye of a hurricane. Guilford gaped at Euphemia in astonishment and Darlton's eyebrows rose in surprise.

"Ggh..." Cornelia growled as she ground her teeth. Then she spoke in a metered tone, "...What did you say?" Her voice was quieter but the emotion behind it was even more intense.

Contrary to the others in the room, Euphemia seemed to have regained her composure. Still, she looked aside from Cornelia awkwardly. She probably had meant to withhold the information about her intent of returning her privilege until the very last minute, knowing that her sister would not approve.

Now that she'd let the secret out, it was too late to take it back. Euphemia collected herself and addressed her sister in a dignified voice, saying, "I am planning to apply to use the Privilege of Exemption from Royalty."

The so-called "privilege" was actually more of a punishment. For centuries, Britannia had maintained laws forbidding members of the royal family from being sentenced to severe punishments like the death penalty or life imprisonment. This stemmed from an era in Britannia in which the Emperor was thought to be chosen by God. The tradition carried on into the present. It certainly wasn't the case that no royal was guilty of severe crimes. As in any monarchy, being high-ranked was no indication of one's moral character. In fact, the power struggles between members of the royal family actually encouraged spiteful and malicious practices. Also, due to frequent intermarriage, some members of royalty were born with mental disorders. These heirs would randomly injure or kill servants and civilians every once in a while. In these cases, Privilege of Exemption from Royalty was often used. Those at fault for some crime would be forced to exercise this privilege, which would allow them to abandon all the rights that they were born with and become ordinary citizens. In return for giving up their privileges, they were absolved of their crimes. Of course, from the general public's point of view, this wasn't any sort of equal punishment. Still, exercising the privilege and becoming an ordinary citizen was a huge blow to those who'd taken authority and luxury for granted their whole lives.

As a matter of fact, in at least one instance, a member of the royal family killed himself as soon as he was ordered to use the privilege. Just as people don't miss what they've never had, people

can lose even souls when they start with so much. Once a person became a regular citizen under this provision, they would be punished as a commoner the next time they committed a crime. In other words, the Privilege of Exemption from Royalty was a once-in-a-lifetime trump card. This was what Euphemia was referring to but hers was a far from normal case.

For one, the privilege existed to punish members of society who were otherwise above the law. Though they might be forced to use it by their peers, no royal ever chose to use it on themselves. And on top of that, there was another issue.

"That privilege... is to be used by members of the royal family to pay for their own mistakes. Zero's sin is his, not yours, Euphy," Cornelia explained, once again on the verge of uncontrolled anger. Euphemia shook her head quietly and said, "No, sister. It is only customary that people don't use that right by their own choice. There is no such regulation written in the constitution. It only says that by abandoning all their royal privileges, a member of the Imperial family may be pardoned for a specific crime."

"Sometimes customs are the rules."

"It has been used in the past to pardon others. For instance, people have used it to pay for mistakes made by their spouse or their knight—"

"Are you saying that you'd throw everything away to atone for Zero's crimes? You, a Britannian princess, is about to discard her life to save a mere terrorist?" Euphemia narrowed her eyes at Cornelia's words and replied, "I chose this because I felt it necessary. Besides, I really don't need these royal privileges in the first place. If I commit a crime in the future, I would be happy to pay for it as a fellow citizen, not as a member of the royal family."

Cornelia bored a hole into the desk with her eyes, hands clasped in front on her forehead to hide her facial expression. Her shoulders trembled slightly. The room was silent for a while until Cornelia said slowly, "Fine. You may leave."

"Sister..."

"Did you not hear me? I'm ordering you to leave, Sub-viceroy Euphemia," Cornelia said in a husky voice. Her face remained hidden. Euphemia looked at her sister, a pained look upon her angelic face. She bowed as decorum dictated, then turned around and walked across the long shag carpet. She paused in front of the door and said, "Sister. This is the only way we can save people who are also important to you."

"....."

"I can't tell you the reason why yet. But I promise I'll talk to you about it. So please... Please understand, sister."

Though she spoke with her back to her sister, her heartfelt plea was unquestionably sincere. Cornelia never raised her head. The room's silence was finally broken only quite some time after Euphemia had left the office.

"Darlton."

"Yes," Darlton answered swiftly as if he'd been waiting. "I'm temporarily releasing you from your duties as chief of staff. Assist Euphy for now. Considering the current situation in Area 11, the assistance she's receiving from the homeland isn't going to be enough to set up her Special Zone. I'll talk to my brother, so you kindly assist Euphy for me."

"... Are you sure about this?"

"A decision made by the homeland is far beyond my control. I'm only the viceroy of a colonized area. Besides, it's already been made public," Cornelia said, still staring at the desk. "Furthermore, it only affects a limited zone, equality within a box as it were, which has nothing to do with my administration of Area 11. Policy isn't going to change here. I'll approve this and let her be but..." Cornelia looked up. Although the eyes that appeared above her clasped hands seemed tired, their natural sharpness remained.

"Guilford," she said.

"Yes, Your Highness?"

"Get in touch with the Chancellor and the Lord President of the Council in the homeland. I'd prefer things weren't this way

but I have no choice. Talk to them so that if Euphy does apply for the Privilege of Exemption from Royalty, they'll delay it as much as possible. I don't care how you do it. Just don't let them approve the application."

"...Yes, Your Highness."

"I will talk to Mother about this. I know she'll never approve of it. If she stands against it, I'm sure other members of the royal family will take our side. I will not," her voice cracked, "let Euphemia do such a thing."



Euphemia's footsteps were heavy as she returned to her room, where a young man waited for her. "Princess Euphemia," he said, smiling.

"Suzaku..." Euphemia replied. The way she said it and her dejected look as she entered the room wiped the smile from his face. He asked awkwardly, "How did the meeting go...with Viceroy Cornelia?"

He knows. He can read it all over my face, Euphemia thought to herself. She'd never seen her sister that mad before and her hands were still shaking.

"It was difficult," Euphemia told him honestly, thinking that he'd guess anyway. "On top of that, I was in the wrong today. I will have to apologize to her later."

But seeing how she reacted, I'm not sure she'll accept my apology. Euphemia's confidence was already starting to crumble; still, she dispersed the negative thought with a shake of her head. She walked by Suzaku to admire the view out the window.

A glowing moon illuminated the landscape below. "But I'm not giving up," Euphemia said. "I will talk to my sister from now on properly, so that she will one day agree with me, even just a little..." she said, mostly to herself.

Suzaku looked a bit down as he said, "I understand."

Euphemia turned around and began, "Suzaku."

"Yes, Princess Euphemia?"

"Do you think my idea is reckless too?" There was a pause before he answered. Then he stared straight at her and answered sincerely, "Yes."

"Good," Euphemia replied.

"What...?" Suzaku said sheepishly, as Euphemia chuckled and said, "Because if you said no I would have been mad at you." What would have upset her was not a differing opinion, but if he had chosen to lie. Euphemia didn't want him to hide his true feelings any longer.

"Suzaku, I'm not such a confident person..." Euphemia said as she opened the window to get some fresh air. A cool breeze wafted in from the open window and fluttered softly against her cheeks. It was warm during the daytime, but cooled down dramatically at night. Gazing at the moon, she continued, "I think I know how hard this will be but I think that, in order to change the nation of Britannia correctly, not by terrorism and war, this is the only way...and that's why I want to do this. I have to do this to save the people I love." Suzaku remained silent. "Besides, Suzaku...this Special Zone is just the beginning. The real fruit comes later."

We will establish a city on Mt. Fuji where the Japanese and the Britannians can live equally. Still, it won't mean anything if that's as far as it goes. That won't change Britannia. There will be Japanese people who can't move to this Special Area and those who don't will remain under the thumb of Britannian giants.

"If the Special Zone succeeds, and becomes a place where peace thrives in the nation of Britannia, I think my sister and my father will start thinking differently. People will want to expand the zone. If we look at Britannia's history, we see that it became a superpower in the same kind of way. It was originally built by people who came to a new continent from the old continent. But,

not all Britannians are descendants of those people. The nation has become what it is now by accepting and integrating people of other ethnicities and all walks of life..." There was bloodshed and battle in the process, that couldn't be left out, but through it all, the nation coalesced into one.

"What I want to do in the Special Zone is to take the first step. I want the city at Fuji to be a place where people acknowledge and support each other—not hate and disgrace each other. And one day, I want such an area to expand across all of Britannia. That's my dream."

Suzaku silently watched Euphemia from behind. The night breeze lifted strands of the princess' long hair gently. As she finished speaking, her hair settled and Suzaku replied, "I personally think that it's a great idea, but..."

"Yes, I know," said Euphemia with her hand placed upon her chest. "It's not going to be easy. It will also take time. It is Britannia who invaded Japan and I am a Britannian. It will take much, much time and effort before the Japanese people accept me. But still, I'm willing to dedicate my life to this, no matter how long the road may be."

"Princess Euphemia..."

"Well, even my whole lifetime might not be even enough but I don't care. If I at least can help Britannia take the first step, and protect the ones I love, then I will have achieved my goals. All I ask is that I get to spend my life with the person I love."

"The person you love...?" Suzaku gaped in surprise.

"Yes," Euphemia nodded emphatically to Suzaku's question. Then a distant look appeared in eyes, and she tilted her head as if pondering something.

What did I just say?

"Spend my life with the person I love...?" she blushed.

"Oh, um... I mean..." she turned around hastily and rattled off something that sounded like an excuse. "I didn't mean that the way it came out. I meant, in general, that I won't be able to do such a

big thing by myself, and I think I should take my time in doing it. I just wanted to say that it's not like I don't think about my future, but when I say 'my' future, I mean not just me, but..." She trailed off. A gust of cold air from the window made Euphemia clutch her arms.

Suzaku, who'd been listening earnestly, relaxed. He took off his jacket, walked up to Euphemia, and placed it over her shoulders. The princess hid her blushing face for a moment, but then met Suzaku's gaze. He nodded with a smile on his face and she smiled back.

"Will you be there for me, Suzaku?"

"I will protect you with my life," he said. Suzaku's hand brushed hers as he put the jacket on her. Both hands were warm and the moonlight was luminous.

The sight must have been beautiful. A girl who has spoken her dreams and chosen to pursue them, leaving behind all her reservations, is joined by a knight who promises to be by her side and protect her forever. Their desires were pure, and their joined hearts innocent.

At the same time, it was impossible not to be skeptical. Weren't they both acting a little hastily? Both had been cared for by others their whole lives. They didn't grow up by themselves, and they seemed to have totally forgotten about the support system that had always been there for them. Plus, was their goal truly as righteous as they felt it to be in that moment?

The same moon Euphemia was looking at reflected in Cornelia's eyes. She was still in her office, alone now that Guilford and Darlton had left. The office doorbell humbly interrupted her trance. Cornelia admitted the guest.

"Excuse me," said Marika, holding some cleaning supplies. "Um, General Darlton contacted me."

"...Oh, yes. Sorry for the trouble." The pieces of the flower vase, broken when she gestured wildly at Euphemia during their argument, remained shattered on the floor. Marika approached the pieces apprehensively, then swallowed her surprise and began cleaning up. First she gathered all the pieces with a brush, removing the bigger pieces with her rubber-gloved hand. With a broom and a dust pan, she collected the smaller pieces and dumped them into a bag. She seemed more relaxed around Cornelia than earlier that day. Her movements were efficient and smooth. Cornelia watched her clean up silently at first, but then said, "Cadet Marika."

"Y-yes, Your Highness?" she replied, seemingly worried to have heard her name called. She blinked her big pretty eyes, stopped what she was doing, and stood up straight.

"May I ask you something?" said Cornelia.

"Yes, whatever you like."

"What was your brother like?" The girl was visibly stunned by Cornelia's words. Her expression was quite impossible to interpret. Cornelia remained silent as the girl gathered her words. "Well," Marika began.

"....."

"I'm sorry. He didn't live in a way that met your standards..."

In fact, his reputation after his death wasn't very good...in fact, it was really bad. It wasn't because his skills as a Nightmare pilot weren't satisfactory. It was because of him as a person. He used to work alongside Jeremiah Gottwald and was planning a coup d'état before Cornelia arrived as viceroy. "But, still, to me..."

"He was a good brother...wasn't he?"

"Y-yes..." the girl squeaked, and then said to Cornelia, "I'm sorry." Her petite shoulders looked quiet fragile.

Cornelia softened and went over to the girl. Her hair was cut short and neatly, as was proper for a cadet. Cornelia placed her hand on the girl's head and stroked softly. "I'm sorry for asking such a thing."

"No, it's fine..."

"Don't worry. I promise I will get your revenge."

"What?"

"That's my job," Cornelia said rather calmly, wondering if the girl had noticed the fierce sparks flaring deep in her eyes, behind the seemingly serene visage.

No. She understands nothing.

That girl...my little sister...She doesn't know anything. The memory of bloodshed can never be erased. There's no way to erase it.

Cornelia had more in mind than Britannian lives. The same thing could be said about the anti-Britannians. God knew how many of them pointed daggers at Cornelia's neck at that very moment. Cornelia was aware because she knew she had done things to deserve that response, even if she never intended to surrender to their vengeance.

From an ethical viewpoint, Euphemia probably does have a point, but the world doesn't operate on ethics. Let's say a man is killed. No matter how wicked the deceased might be, no one could tell his family not to hate the killer. No one can tell this girl who's dealing with her brother's death to love his murderer.

Philanthropy was a lovely word, but Cornelia, a Britannian princess as well as a soldier who had presided over pitiless battlefields, knew that a world built on philanthropy was colder than a world built on continuous warfare. Hate and resentment, which were natural human emotions, would be considered evil. False kindness would be the law of the "utopia." Humanity would be lost in such an empty, perpetually frozen land.

"Yes," Cornelia whispered. "Many of us Britannians, who are supposedly superior to Zero, were slain and we can never forgive him..."

CODE GEASS
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反逆のルージュ
Lelouch
of the Rebellion

Interval

December 2017, Area 11

Euphemia's proposed Specially Administrated Zone of Japan would be the first attempt of its kind in Britannia, though similar attempts at equality had been made elsewhere.

For instance, the Chinese Federation contained an autonomous state. In the Chinese Federation, only one person was recognized as superior—the Emperor. Everyone else was considered to be of lower but equal status and social class was abolished. The autonomous region was a place where the Federation's minority groups clustered, those with cultural differences from the rest of the Federation. With permission from the Emperor, they were allowed to govern themselves. Within that state, individuals were allowed to retain their ethnic traditions. To a certain degree, they were allowed to refuse the capitol's control. Outside the Federation, the EU had originally been a consortium of multiple nations. Each nation retained their name and borders while also being part of the EU. In fact, it could be said the EU was entirely composed of autonomous states.

Compared to those administrative systems, the idea of the Japan Special Zone was flimsy democratically and lacking in ethnic self-determination. For example, although disparity existed between EU nations in the realms of economy and defense, each nation officially held the same level of authority. That would not be the case between Japan and Britannia. Both legally and in practice, the Japan Special Zone would only be a specially administrated section within a Britannian colony. The Chinese Federation's

independent state was led by an official elected from within it. The Japan Special Zone would have an administrative government, but there would be no self-government. The fact that the third princess of Britannia, Euphemia li Britannia, had already been assigned the position of administrator of the region explained that it was hardly autonomous. It would be Japan governed by Britannia, and not Japan governed by the Japanese. Some looked at this as no difference from any other area.

Yet, compared to the forceful way that Britannia had been acquiring colonies, there was no doubt in the minds of people who clung to the name "Japan" that the zone was a promising beginning. It represented compromise. As Euphemia had said, some would see the zone as the first step. Additionally, as long as Euphemia declared as a government official that there would be no suppression of or discrimination against the Japanese, people who had spent years suffering under Britannian control had no reason not to back the plan. They were easily convinced by her image as "the princess who doesn't discriminate against the Japanese" as well as by the fact that her personal knight, Suzaku Kururugi, was Japanese. Many felt that as long as Euphemia was at the helm, the plan could be trusted.

Nearly a month had passed since the sudden announcement of the Special Zone's establishment.

The number of Japanese requesting relocation to the Special Zone was reaching three hundred thousand. Both Britannian sympathizers and anti-Britannians alike applied to enter the Special Zone. The plan's originator, Euphemia, prepared for the opening ceremonies of the Special Zone while also discussing the structural details with administrative assistants and her personal assistants Darlton and Suzaku. Establishment of the Special Zone took more than residents. It required establishing a social security network for the residents, the building of cities, creation of jobs, deployment of

law enforcement, and so many other issues. Fortunately, "Kyoto," also known as the NAC, had pledged support. Thanks to them, initial capital for construction had been raised and the corporate incentive plan was going well.

As the Japan Special Zone rapidly reached completion, people's interest became directed toward another surprising item that Euphemia had outlined in her speech as a part of the Special Zone plan. Euphemia had declared that she would pardon Zero of all his crimes if he joined the Special Zone. She astonished the public five days before the ceremony when she announced that she would leave a seat open for Zero at the ceremony. Now the ball was in Zero's court. Euphemia had extended her hand to Zero. Would he take it? On one hand, if Euphemia was true to her word, Zero's and the Black Knights' safety would be assured if they joined. On the other hand, they would be forced to disarm. Naturally, they wouldn't be allowed to keep weapons that could threaten the peace of Britannia or the Special Zone.

Would Zero reject Euphemia's proposal then? Many sympathized with his difficult position. But if he opposed the formation of the Special Zone, it would throw into question the meaning of Zero as well as the Black Knights' existence itself. One thing that could not be ignored was that the Black Knights advocated protection of the weak and not the destruction of Britannia—the exact same ideological stance as Euphemia. If Zero took an opposing stance, he'd be defying his own principles. In addition, the Japanese were more inclined to support Euphemia and her idea of the Japan Special Zone than to support Zero's armed resistance. He ran the risk of completely alienating the populace if he opposed the idea.

Many people figured that Zero would most likely wait and see. Euphemia's plan for the Special Zone was limited to the current Fuji Administrative Zone, while Britannia's domineering colonial operations continued unfettered in the rest of Area 11. Zero probably wouldn't say or do anything about the Special Zone.

They believed he would maintain his anti-Britannian activity elsewhere. Ironically, this was the same conclusion reached by Cornelia, the viceroy of Area 11, looking at the other side of the coin. She, along with the others, saw it as Zero's only choice.



"...In any case, the formal opening ceremony for the Japan Special Zone five days from now will draw global attention. How will Zero respond? For a guy who keeps showing the world what a bad guy he is, looks like he's hesitant to take the stage as a good guy. Hmph. They look like they know what they're talking about...and it sounds like they know you've already lost. Well, I guess it can't be helped since this news site is sort of on the Britannian side," said C.C., scrolling down the computer screen. As usual, she wore her straightjacket.

Lelouch didn't respond to C.C. He was immersed in packing something into a bag. It was a squarish object that looked somewhat like a mobile communicator.

"Surprisingly, Britannian reaction is all over the place. Although, perhaps because of whose plan this is, no one dares criticize it in public...There are some who oppose it in a roundabout way by saying it's against national policy, and there are quite a few who say that it's a good addition to existing colonial policy. This is becoming a heated discussion...Oh," C.C. said with surprise. "There's a demonstration going on in the self-governed state of the Chinese Federation. Maybe they were inspired by what's going on here." C.C. continued ranting, saying that though they claimed their government to be autonomous, that was only on the surface. "The highest levels of their government are in the pocket of the Emperor's High Eunuchs. Either way, it seems Euphemia's actions ignited their volatile situation."

Lelouch was uncharacteristically silent, when he usually would have smartly retorted. He hooked up the bag as he pretended not to listen. He grabbed the jacket hanging on the sofa, calmly put it on, and said, "I'm leaving."

"Leaving for where?"

"Do I owe you an explanation?"

"I guess not, but I've already ordered us a midnight snack," C.C. said, pointing at two pizza boxes on the table. Usually, he would have snapped at her, demanding to know why she'd do such a thing. This time, he just glanced at the boxes as if he could care less. "I'm sure you can handle them all by yourself," he said.

"I don't know about two pizzas at this time of the night," C.C. said.

"Then put what you can't finish in the freezer."

"I don't like cold pizza."

"Then eat it all now," Lelouch said, quickly grabbing his bag and leaving the room. His black-clad back disappeared out the door. C.C. shrugged as she watched him leave, then walked away from the desk where she'd been standing.

It was a quiet night. C.C. went back to her usual post—splayed out on the bed with a pizza box in hand. She picked a slice out of the open box and brought it to her mouth. She took a big bite and mumbled to herself, "You've always been a bad actor."

Lelouch had been acting distant for a while, specifically since Euphemia announced the establishment of the Special Zone. No matter how much C.C. talked to him about it, Lelouch would deflect the conversation. He pretended not to be interested, although he seemed to be having constant meetings with Diethard and Tohdoh of the Black Knights. He'd been going out at night alone a lot. It was obvious to C.C. that he was detailing countermeasures and responses to Euphemia's plan, but he wouldn't discuss them with C.C. He probably thought he was under no obligation to share the information with C.C. She understood that; she wasn't looking for

a close, friendly relationship with him either. Lelouch could do whatever he wanted, but...

It's all well and good for him to do what he wants but I wish he'd disguise his feelings better. It wasn't sarcasm. Lelouch's tense attitude was stressing her out too.

"Ridiculous. That scenario is nothing but an empty dream," was the first and last thing Lelouch said about the Special Zone to C.C.

"Hmph," C.C. mumbled to herself. "An empty dream, huh?" she said as she took bites into the slice of pizza. "I guess that's what he wants to think..."

In reality, C.C. knew that history was full of examples of autocratic multi ethnic nations enacting conciliatory measures for their minority races. What was being done with the self-governed area in the Chinese Federation drew on history's legacy as well. Sometimes these attempts failed and sometimes they succeeded for a while, but this type of measure had yet to produce any permanent successes. Then again, no nation had lasted forever either; therefore, the argument was irrelevant.

Britannians often praised their own country for being a superpower replete with rich history and traditions, but in C.C.'s eyes, the nation was only a baby of a couple of hundreds years old. For humans, if something succeeded over a couple of hundreds of years, or even a couple of decades, it was worthy of being called a successful accomplishment. Everyone would believe that the next generation could improve on it and so the system would be passed down and replicated.

Naturally, Lelouch must have been aware of that. C.C. figured that was the cause of Lelouch's current behavior. Lelouch didn't think that Euphemia's idea would fail. He believed the opposite. Because a possibility that it would succeed existed, Lelouch was forced to take precautionary measures. C.C. also felt his irritation at the whole thing was rooted in very deep animosity to make him act so blatantly annoyed. After all, Lelouch, Zero and the

Black Knights had reached a fork in the road. If they opposed the Special Zone, they risked their popular support crumbling. If they yielded, they'd be forced to disarm. All the effort that Lelouch had put forth over the last ten months could be ruined by one princess' proclamation. Lelouch couldn't possibly be indifferent.

The dull whir of the air conditioner was C.C.'s only companion in Lelouch's empty room. Darkness blanketed and obscured the world outside the window.

It must be cold out there. C.C. thought as she slowly consumed her pizza. After she'd consumed half of the first pizza, she said to herself, "Zero and the Black Knights aren't the most important thing to him."

It was obvious. The Black Knights and Japan's independence weren't the top objectives on Lelouch's priority list. They were nothing but means to an end. The most important objective, for the sake of his sister Nunnally, was to reveal the truth about his mother's death and to exact revenge on his father. These objectives and Euphemia's Special Zone didn't necessarily conflict with each other. In a sense, the princess' actions constituted a more serious rebellion against Britannia than Zero and the Black Knights. Hers was an ideological rebellion. If Euphemia's idea succeeded, it would inevitably change the Britannia ruled by Lelouch's father Charles zi Britannia. That wouldn't mean a spate of bad luck for Lelouch either, since a time of change could create room for an attack. If he was daring, Lelouch could choose to abandon the Black Knights and ride Euphemia's wave. Euphemia's chance of success increased if Lelouch was on her side, considering his intelligence and his superpower called geass. Lelouch could then utilize Euphemia's Special Zone to pursue his own objectives. The Black Knights and other anti-Britannian Japanese might label him a traitor but, in the end, that wouldn't impede Lelouch much. By nature, he valued results and accomplishment more than how they were accomplished. He would quiet those people by stating, "You Japanese are equal to Britannians now. I've granted your wishes,

stop complaining." Not that the people would be happy with that answer.

At the end of the day, the existence of the Black Knights and Japanese independence were not reason enough for Lelouch to decline Euphemia's invitation. Contrary to public speculation, if Lelouch had been his usual calculating self, he would have considered accepting Euphemia's hand, but he wasn't. Although Lelouch pretended he was indifferent, he couldn't conceal his anger toward Euphemia and her Special Zone. His irrationality indicated to C.C. that Euphemia had done more besides endanger Zero and the Black Knights to infuriate Lelouch. C.C. wondered what it could be...then suddenly, realized what it was.

Before she knew it, the first pizza was all gone. She still had room in her stomach. *Hmm, I can easily finish the second pizza.* She put the empty pizza box into the garbage bin, grabbed the second box of pizza, and opened it casually.

However things went, C.C. had no intention of interfering with Lelouch's thoughts or plans in regards to this dilemma. If he asked for it, she would help, but she wasn't going to volunteer herself. Lelouch could do as he pleased. That's just the way she was.

Indeed, C.C. could care less whether Lelouch's rebellion against Britannia succeeded or failed. In short, the outcome of the rebellion was not necessary for C.C. to obtain her ultimate objective, just as the Black Knights and Japanese independence were not for Lelouch.



Under the starlight, a slim shadow caught the attention of a man who was hurrying on his way to the dorms. The man asked, "What do you want?" Sometimes he would ask, "Who are you?" But the shadow answered almost every time, "Excuse me, I have a small favor to ask, Lieutenant." His red left eye glowed in the dark.

flashing with geass, the absolute ability to command anyone. The man and the shadow parted ways as if they'd never seen each other, as if such a small encounter had never existed.

Thus, in the middle of the street after the man had left, the shadow, Lelouch Lamperouge, silently looked up at the night sky.

His eyes reflected the pure glow of the stars, yet they looked sterner than they had ever looked in any battle, infused with hatred sharp enough to slash anything that came close enough.

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STAGE-4: 2-COLLAPSE

[Evil Eye]

The story of so-called Evil Eye exists in every culture and mythology. Many variations exist, although the concept is not necessarily always explicit and the stories vastly differ in their specifics. In most of the stories, the person who gains the evil eye is one of two kinds—someone who obtains it deliberately, or someone who obtains it against their wishes. The latter cases end up with a wide mixture of results, including losing the power, the power getting out of control, overcoming the power and so forth. On the other hand, the former cases usually end in tragedy. There is room for discussion whether or not the tragedy that the outside world sees is indeed a tragedy to the person possessing the power.

December 2017, Area 11

The ceremony venue was a remodeled sports stadium from the pre-war era.

A row of tall poles scraped the sky, flying the flags of Britannia and Japan. The image symbolized the Japan Special Zone exactly the way Euphemia had dreamed of. Neither flag looked down on the other. They respected each other at the same eye level.

The area was boiling over with the heat generated by the people packing the stadium. The stands were full and not a seat remained in the chairs set up on the former field area. People who hadn't been able to get in gathered outside the stadium, where a jumbotron aired the satellite broadcast. Naturally, the crowd was all Japanese, except for Area 11 security forces soldiers on hand for emergencies, and the Britannian officials onstage. Including those tuning in at home, how many people worldwide were watching the ceremony? Despite the massive support, one person's non-attendance threatened to overshadow the gratifying anticipation in the hearts of the attendees and observers.

In the middle of the stage, the formally attired Euphemia waved to resounding cheers as she took her seat. She gave a quick glance at the chair next to her, reserved for the guest of honor. Next to that was her assistant, Darlton. A representative from Kyoto also sat nearby, as did a high-ranking Britannian official, but the chair next to Euphemia remained open. The person who the chair was reserved for, the man in the mask, was nowhere to be found.

"He's not coming...as I thought," Euphemia sighed, disappointed. Still, she wasn't ready to give up hope.

It's okay. If he doesn't respond this time, I'll just have to try again. I know it won't be easy. Even if he doesn't respond the first or second time, that's not enough to dissuade me. I must not give up. I'll never withdraw the hand that has been extended. If not today, there is tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that, until the day that he comes.

Returning her focus to the scene, Euphemia looked at the man standing diagonally across the stage from her. It was her knight, garbed in white and standing at attention as her guard. The knight, Suzaku Kururugi, noticed Euphemia looking at him and she perked up with a smile. Euphemia smiled back.

That's right. There are people who support me, like him. I will no longer be indecisive.

"Princess Euphemia, it's time," said Darlton, looking at his watch while hinting that she begin the ceremony. The time had come. Euphemia was to give her welcoming address.

"Right," Euphemia nodded and stood up. Bearing a weight on her shoulders that was thirty percent anxiety and seventy percent responsibility, she walked toward the raised platform at center stage. She stood in front of the microphone.

Suddenly, a hubbub coursed throughout the stadium. Euphemia looked at where the noise was coming from and gasped.

A black dot floated in the clear blue sky. As the dot approached, it became apparent that the object was not a TV station's light aircraft, but something of a form of human and a Knightmare. A person rode on the Knightmare, not in the cockpit but on its left shoulder. The sun glinted off his mask and his cape flapped in the wind.

"It's Zero!"

The Britannian guards tensed, but a wide smile spread across Euphemia's face. She raised her hands to the sky, her joyful voice echoing, "Oh, he came after all!" across the stadium.

"Security is tight. Snipers have us in their sights even if we can't see them," C.C. said from Gawain's cockpit. Lelouch stood on Gawain, so C.C.'s voice was relayed to him through a transmitter inside his mask. He smirked as the wind whipped his clothing about.

"Naturally," he said. "If I behave poorly, they'll toss away Euphemia's promise like a piece of trash. I'm sure we'd have been bit by an attack or two before we got this close if I hadn't been riding outside of the Knightmare." Then Lelouch grumbled, "That's just how Britannia does things." On the other side of the transmitter, C.C. went silent for some reason. Then she spoke, "Let me just say this...I don't think that the princess would order that."

"I know. But that's Euphemia's..." Lelouch swallowed what he was about to say and narrowed his eyes. Gawain had reached a point directly above the ceremony venue. Down below, Euphemia welcomed Lelouch, behind Zero's mask, with a smile.

"Zero, welcome to the Specially Administrated Zone of Japan!" She greeted him without hesitation. Lelouch gritted his teeth then switched the microphone under his mask from internal to external.

"Greetings, Euphemia li Britannia. I would like to request an audience with you," he declared.

"Just with me?"

"Yes. With you alone." Euphemia looked unconvinced for a moment. She didn't know what Lelouch's intention was, but she didn't take long to decide. After inclining her head for a moment in thought, she gave a small nod to Zero. All the Britannians who were unaware of Zero's true identity were astonished, and tried to stop her. She ordered them to settle down and arrange a place for her to meet Zero. The preparations were completed immediately.

Lelouch's Gawain was guided to Britannian Forces' land-based mothership, the G1 Base, which was parked right behind the stage. As soon as Gawain landed and Lelouch set foot on the

ground, Euphemia's bodyguards gave his body a safety check. Once they determined that he passed, Euphemia beckoned him in.

"Then, this way please," she said, but before they could enter the G1, someone came between Euphemia and Lelouch. It was a knight dressed all in white.

"Suzaku?"

"Princess Euphemia, it is too dangerous to be alone with this man." As he stood in front of the princess to protect her, he looked straight at Zero's mask and said, "At least, allow me to escort you."

Euphemia chuckled. "No, it's all right."

"But..."

"As I told you before, as long as I'm the way I am, you need not worry." Her meaning was unclear to Lelouch, who heard their whole conversation, but whatever it was seemed to have worked. Suzaku's didn't appear to object as sharply, but when he opened a path for them, his eyes still held some level of uncertainty.

"Shall we, Zero?" Euphemia beckoned Lelouch down a ramp into the G1 Base. Lelouch felt Suzaku's fierce gaze upon him as he passed, but he did not glance at his friend even under the cover of the mask.

Inside of the powered down Gawain, C.C. watched the proceedings through an external monitor.

Even C.C. didn't know what Lelouch was going to do next. She knew that he was up to something, but in the end he'd never let her in on his plan. C.C. had some ideas, but wasn't sure which direction Lelouch was going to take. He might even do something that defied her expectations.

He's not very clever when he has his back to the wall though, C.C. thought.

But then again, whatever happened would be fine. As said before, Lelouch's continued charade as Zero and the leader of the Black Knights didn't concern C.C. much. As she was thinking, *As long as he's with the princess, there should be no immediate danger*, a sharp pain stabbed into her.

She felt like someone was squeezing her head, trying to invade it. It was as if somebody was watching her, and so looked at the cockpit monitor to see what was going on outside.

"Is it really alright, leaving her alone with Zero...?"

"But she ordered us to..."

"Well, she can always press the emergency call button."

Euphemia's bodyguards exchanged a worried conversation. C.C. felt that something more was going on. Someone else had definitely noticed her. She looked at the side monitor.

There was Suzaku Kururugi, staring in surprise at Gawain. The look differed greatly from the stern one he'd worn a short time previous while Gawain landed on bent knee on top of the G1 Base.

"It looks like," said C.C., narrowing her eyes and looking back at him, "you can see me. Is that because of our indirect contact and what occurred on Kamine Island? Though the way it was done was irregular, I wouldn't be surprised if the connection we had before allows you to sense me...no, wait a minute!" A sudden thought caught the usually deadpan C.C. by surprise. A blank expression showed up on her reserved, intelligent face. She strained her eyes at the figure of Suzaku in the monitor. *Could he possibly be...?*

2

Lelouch knew it was only his ego speaking, and not logic.

Despite Euphemia li Britannia's innocence and naïveté, there was something powerful about her Lelouch had to acknowledge.

In reality, the majority of Japan was not exactly behind the concept of the Japan Special Zone. The plan itself was still way too far from their idea of Japanese independence. And the plan had internal faults as well. A critic would say that Euphemia's plan was being showered with undeserved praise. The public's support, though, was not based on the strength of the plan itself.

What they praised so highly and trusted...was Euphemia li Britannia herself. When Lelouch realized that, he was speechless. All the campaigns and everything he had done as Zero up to that point flashed into his mind. He'd accomplished so much: he'd denounced Britannia's inhumane policies and created the supposed messiah of Japan, Zero. Yet Euphemia destroyed all of what he had built so easily. Was it due to the difference in their status—a mysterious masked man versus Euphemia, the pedigreed princess? No, that couldn't be it, since an increasing number of Japanese people remained skeptical of Euphemia's ultimate goals. For many Japanese, she was first and foremost the princess of an invading nation. The Japanese had the chance to stir up trouble about the Special Zone.

But they didn't. With that one televised declaration, Euphemia changed the direction of the wind completely. Even Kyoto was making a show of cuddling up with her. Lelouch was encountering a yet-to-be-faced opponent. Something who fought with something totally different from schemes and strategies...the very thought took Lelouch's breath away for a moment.

They aren't being won over with tactics or maneuvering? But they aren't being won over by Euphemia's ideas and words, either... Wait, that means...

It meant her existence itself was compelling. Even though she was his own half-sister, Lelouch never noticed the innate power Euphemia, the third princess of the Britannian Empire, possessed.

Should we call that power the charisma of the good? A force, not reason or logic, that compelled people spontaneously to join and aid such a person. Lelouch knew of few people in history who possessed the same type of power: a great leader who pioneered non-violent resistance steered racial violence onto the path of peace; an international commissioner with a deeply dedicated spirit who established a refugee camp organization which became a nation. This kind of leader attracted people with the way they lived their lives, not through their spoken theories and ideologies. Now, the light emitted by Euphemia was much smaller and dimmer than those great figures, but dim as it was, it shone. What starts with one can become two, and three, and has the potential to become ten, one thousand or even ten thousand.

Lelouch was now certain that Euphemia possessed that kind of magnetism. Looking back, the way Lelouch had acted on Kamine Island was due to her power. Hurting Euphemia had been the last thing on his mind; instead, he wanted to help her. He could list off perfectly logical reasons for doing so, such as the extenuating circumstances or because his sister Nunnally admired Euphemia and so on. But wasn't it really because he'd been attracted to her charisma? In the past, Lelouch had never hesitated to assault a blood relative in order to accomplish his goal.

Then there was Suzaku. During the seven years they were apart, Suzaku seemed to have changed a lot. The once violent lone wolf had softened and become kind to everyone around him. To Lelouch, that kindness seemed nothing but a wall keeping people out. Suzaku even acted distant from Lelouch and Nunnally. Lelouch asked a few times why he was acting that way, but never penetrated his friend's defense. But he'd opened up his closed heart to Euphemia. Not to Lelouch and Nunnally, with whom he spent his childhood, but to Euphemia who he'd only known for months.

I have to admit it. I can't keep denying it.

The past spring, when Lelouch first heard the news that Euphemia and her sister Cornelia would be transferred to Area 11,

it evoked a bittersweet nostalgia in Lelouch. He certainly hadn't been afraid of them. To that very day, he was confident of his superiority over Euphemia in both military strategy and political maneuvering. If they ever fought, he felt victory would belong to him. Her sister Cornelia would put up a good fight, but not Euphemia. Lelouch had just wanted to get her out of harm's way and move her someplace else if he had the chance. He would feel bad if he involved her and he didn't want Nunnally to worry about her either.

Yet, things turned out quite differently. All the advances he'd made over the year, endangering his life, were about to be set back, not by Cornelia's military skills or the force of the mighty Britannian military lead by Darlton and Guilford. The existence of Euphemia, like Britannia alone, was about to do it. Such was Euphemia's power—a force unrecognized by the very person possessing it, an innate strength able to overturn skillfully articulated military strategies and political tactics. Her sister Cornelia didn't have it. In all likelihood, Lelouch probably didn't possess it either. He could move people with geass and eloquent speeches, but he wasn't able to compel people to follow him by example. He would never possess that power. With what Euphemia had, one could become two, but what is zero will never become one.

I'll be taken in...

If things kept going on the same path, even Lelouch would be swallowed by Euphemia's righteous and peaceful world. *In that world, I would be released from my scars, my need for vengeance would drain away, and I'd spend peaceful days with Nunnally and other kind people...* No sooner had he envisioned that than hatred flared through his very being. It was the opposite of Suzaku's reaction to such a brilliant world, as Suzaku had found a place in her world and become determined to protect it.

I would forget everything in that utopia overflowing with goodwill and happiness.

What about the pain he suffered in the past? What about his mother's death? What of Nunnally's sorrow and his revenge on their father? Everything would disappear. That despair and that pain would cease to exist, swallowed by the positivity that Euphemia emitted.

I can't let that happen. I'll never let it happen! No matter what!

He knew it wasn't about reason. He knew that his sense of self depended on the very things Euphemia would take from him. His whole life would be obliterated by the fearsome power of righteous goodwill, his most dire enemy. He could fight force with force; he could fight politics with politics, but he had no idea how to fight against the invisible charisma of kindness.

Euphemia, the Britannian princess who held that strength and was about to overpower him, could no longer be allowed to exist.

When he reached the bridge of the G1 where he'd been guided to, Lelouch turned off all the information instruments, including communication devices. Watching him from behind, Euphemia said with a sign of dismay, "Even though the cameras are off, you're being extremely careful aren't you?"

"I've been in hiding a long time," Lelouch said as he removed his mask, "due to a certain Empire, I'm afraid." He reached inside the mask. Euphemia's bodyguards hadn't touched the inside of the mask during their body check. It would have revealed Zero's face, so Lelouch refused, and Euphemia, who already knew his identity, let him keep it on. The rest of the body check was conducted by sensor.

Lelouch pulled a small gun out of the mask. He aimed it at her.

"This is a needle gun made from ceramic and bamboo. It can't be picked up on a metal detector."

Euphemia blinked at the gun and smiled innocently. "Lelouch, you would never shoot me, would you?" she said sweetly. Her unshakable certainty and unconditional kindness were nothing but a nuisance to Lelouch now, especially because he was aware that her subconscious power would easily topple his resolve.

"No, I would never do that," Lelouch said in a very deliberate voice. "You'll be doing the shooting, Euphy."

"Huh?" she said blankly, caught completely off guard.

Suzaku was astonished to see C.C. descend from the cockpit of Gawain.

"You're..." said Suzaku. They'd met before, back when Lelouch made his pact with C.C.

C.C. cut him off. "I need to know one thing," she stated calmly. "Are you the...Ggh!" A strange pressure squeezed C.C.'s head again and she groaned. It was a different pressure from before, and quickly morphed into pain. C.C. couldn't help pressing a hand to her forehead. It was hot and a red light shone there completely against her will. The light was in the shape of a flying bird—the sign of Geass.

"No way..." C.C. fell on her knees in shock. "It's too early... Argh! I said not to depend on it so much...!"

"H-hey, what's wrong?"

C.C. could barely see Suzaku running toward her in her increasingly cloudy sight. She wanted to tell him to stay away but she couldn't talk. *This isn't good. If contact occurs accidentally while the pathway is still going through...*

Suzaku reached out to keep C.C. from falling. The moment his hand touched her, electricity shot through Suzaku's body and he flailed.

"Ah...uh...ah..." he groaned as he fell to the ground.

"Major Kururugi!"

"Why, you...! What have you done to him?" shouted Euphemia's bodyguards as they rushed over. Several arms tried to grab C.C. In her dimming consciousness, C.C. tried to reverse the circuit on her own this time. The bodyguards all collapsed to the ground with a groan similar to Suzaku's. It was the best C.C. could do as the headache grew stronger.

"No..." she said. They'd reached a milestone, and the fact that C.C. was affected meant that her contractor, Lelouch...

The G1 Base's bridge was dark, illuminated only by the emergency lighting. It was silent except for two voices echoing around the room.

"This ceremony is being broadcast globally and the world is going to witness you, a Britannian princess, shoot Zero. What do you think will happen next?" Lelouch chuckled with a bitter smile. Euphemia tilted her head in confusion; she'd picked up on Lelouch's ill will, but didn't really comprehend what he said.

"Rioting will break out among the Japanese I imagine," she answered automatically.

"Right," Lelouch's lip curled. "Zero will become a martyr, tricked into a death trap, and instantly your popularity will crash to earth. Their anger will destroy Britannia, and you with it."

"What kind of nonsense are you saying?" Euphemia said, clearly distraught. She stepped toward Lelouch, continuing, "The reason why you came here today is because you support the Special Zone, right? You should just help me rebuild Japan."

"If you force it upon us from on high, then you're just as bad as Clovis was," said Zero, smugly.

"Excuse me?"

"All tasks at hand have been cleared. After hovering near death, Zero will be met with cheers when he makes a miraculous

recovery. Because people don't give a damn about reason, but nobody can resist miracles. Now, take the gun."

"Huh?"

Lelouch flipped the needle gun and offered it to her. Euphemia was at a total loss. Even if she understood the meaning of the words spoken, she couldn't connect the dots in her head. Lelouch's smirk grew.

"There can only be one messiah. Once people realize you're a false one, they'll change their minds. Whether you are or aren't doesn't matter. I have no intention of being the true messiah. What's important is that Zero needs—" He was going to continue on to say that the Zero needed to be seen as the messiah, but before he got the words out, pain shot through his left eye.

"Ggh!" He'd felt a less severe version of the same throbbing before when he saw the ruins on Kamine Island. Now it hurt as if something was about to leap from the back of his eyeball into his brain. Or like his brain was being eaten. Lelouch spasmed, dropping the needle gun.

"Lelouch?" Euphemia instantly reacted by trying to put her hand on his shoulder. Lelouch swung at her.

"Stop it! Stop giving me your pity!" he snarled. "Spare me your charity! This is something I have to achieve on my own! So for that," Lelouch glared while covering his left eye, "I will now stain your hands with blood Euphemia li Britannia!!"

With the princess looking straight at him, Lelouch took his hand off his left eye. Though the pain still throbbed, the red light and geass sigil were about to emerge.

"I have renounced that name!" Euphemia cried in a voice so sincere that Lelouch completely stopped what he was doing.

The soft flow of recycled air was the only thing stirring inside the G1 Base. On its bridge, two figures stood facing each other across the command seat on the bridge of the ship. One gaped in shock, the other stared at him with calm, determined self-possession.

After some time passed, Euphemia repeated in a composed tone, "There'll probably be a formal announcement about it issued from the homeland any day now. I've given up my claim to the throne, and am going to embrace my new identity as a Britannian citizen."

"Why...?" asked Lelouch, stunned. "It isn't because you accepted Zero...is it?" Lelouch remembered that he too had cast off his right to the Imperial throne. He was well aware of the right to abandon it. His eyes begged Euphemia for the answer. She nodded delicately.

"Well, of course. I have to pay the price for doing something so selfish. Those are the consequences," Euphemia said simply, but Lelouch knew how huge this was. For a member of the royal family, it was the equivalent having your entire existence being taken away. Lelouch had experienced that isolation and despair when the man he called Father rejected and denied him, and then exiled him to Japan, now Area 11.

"You'd give all that up so easily? And I suppose you did it for my sake," Lelouch said, still unable to hide his shock.

"As conceded as you ever were," Euphemia chuckled. "But sorry, you're half wrong. This is more for Nunnally than for you."

"!"

"It happened when I visited your school's cultural festival the other day..." Euphemia explained. While there, she'd had a chance to talk to her younger sister Nunnally in secret. Nunnally asked her not to disclose their identities to anyone because, as she said, "As long as I can be with my brother, I don't need anything else."

As long as Zero was a rebel, Nunnally's only wish couldn't be granted even by the success of the Special Zone. Zero would remain a criminal, and once he was captured by Britannia, Nunnally would lose her brother for good. Life as she knew it would be irrevocably altered. What could Euphemia do to protect these two family members she cared for so deeply?

The path she'd chosen was her answer to that question.

Lelouch was still looking at Euphemia with pained eyes. "For that...petty reason..."

"That's right, Lelouch. That's how I made up my mind," Euphemia smiled again. "Do you understand now? I'm not giving up anything that has significant meaning or real worth to me. I may—no, I certainly will face difficulties in the future because I've lost my claim to the throne. But I did it to protect the things that are precious to me. I'm not confident enough to say that I won't regret this...but I know I'm not doing anything wrong, even if there may be a time when I look back and see other ways I could have handled things.

"Huh..." Lelouch started giggle. "Ha ha ha ha ha!" he burst out in sudden loud laughter. "And Cornelia? Doesn't your choice mean that you've lost your precious sister?"

Euphemia shook her head, "It's not like I'll never see her again."

"Hmph. Euphy, you are a fool. An amazing fool."

Euphemia finally got offended by this. "Jeez. I know I'm not as smart as you Lelouch. I've never been about to beat you at games or academics," the girl pouted. It was the face of the little sister Lelouch knew so well. She wasn't two-faced like Lelouch, but simple, pure and innocent.

Was it only an illusion?

C.C. freely called herself a witch, but to Lelouch, the real witch was Euphemia right after the announcement of the Special Zone. She'd bewitched the hearts of the people in Area 11 instantaneously, despite her lack of experience and real authority. *She holds the power I lack*, Lelouch thought. *Some kind of amazing power*. Except for the fact that they were both born into Britannian royalty, Lelouch and Euphemia had experienced very different lives, from the way they were raised, to their life experiences, to their personalities and thought processes. Therefore, it was only natural that Euphemia could do things Lelouch couldn't, and Lelouch could do what Euphemia couldn't.

Was that all it was about? They were two different people; and that's why Euphemia was concerned about Lelouch and Nunnally, and wanted to change the ways of Britannia. She tried to enact those changes in the ways that she could. She was just a girl, neither a witch nor a saint, just a girl who was trying very hard to make her wishes come true. She was Lelouch's kindhearted sister who always smiled so happily in the palace's garden, yet he'd felt like she was a monster after his blood.

Maybe I'm wrong. I must have been wrong. This Euphemia standing before me is the same Euphemia I've always known. She hasn't changed.

As soon as Lelouch thought that, something inside of him broke, as if the lock guarding his heart had been cracked open. "However..." he said. *Either way...* Lelouch closed his eyes. Maybe things were destined to turn out like this. He'd never had a chance of winning. He had to acknowledge that it wasn't military might or clever strategies that had won the day. It wasn't the distorted power of geass, but a pure glow that humbled those around it and made them want to help. It was not the artificial miracle that he was trying to manufacture, but the genuine miracle generated by the wonders of human to human relationships. Lelouch had tried to fight it because he couldn't admit that he didn't have the same power. He put all of his pride on the line to defeat it, but the results were already written on the wall because...

Because he could never have genuinely hated this girl in front of him.

"In your usual rash Euphy fashion, you've managed to win it all," Lelouch admitted. "When I think of you, I don't visualize a sub-viceroy or a Britannian princess. I only see the plain little Euphy that you used to be." That same little Euphy who hadn't lost her glow.

"Then will you join plain little Euphy and help her?" Euphemia said solemnly as she extended her hand to Lelouch. He sighed. The sigh was neither long nor heavy but it released a month's worth of pent up negativity and left him refreshed.

It should have ended there, with a handshake between a princess—no, a former princess, and the young man who shook her hand. That gesture should have ended that chapter in their lives.

"You are," Lelouch conceded, "the worst opponent I have ever faced. You win."

"Then..."

"I'll think of some ways to improve your Special Zone," he continued. "There's a long way to go but I can depend on you and Suzaku. Oh, but I have no intention of becoming your subordinate Euphy. Allow me to have that much pride."

"A...Alright!" Euphemia nodded, her face beaming. Then she looked a bit sheepish. "But you don't have very much faith in me, do you?"

"Hmm?"

"Did you honestly believe that simply by threatening me I would shoot you?"

"Ah..." Lelouch returned her sheepish grin. "Oh no, you've got it all wrong. When I really want people to follow my orders, they will not resist me." Maybe because it was because of the relief flooding through his body, but Lelouch thought he felt some of the pain rushing back to his left eye.

Maybe it's all in my mind.

"Whether it's to shoot me, to dismiss Suzaku...any order at all."

"Oh, now you're being silly," Euphemia chuckled. "Stop playing with me."

"I'm serious..."

Huh?

"For example... Well, of course I didn't really get to the point of executing this one, but..."

Something's happening...

"...this idea did cross my mind..."

Something's happening to my brain...

...I could even order you to kill all the Japanese."

Something's taking over my brain...

"Even such an order can be made..."

CLICK

At that moment, something sinister clicked inside of Lelouch, as if two cogs that had been separate found their match and clasped together. "It wouldn't matter how you felt about it," Lelouch finished, looking directly at Euphemia.

Euphemia's pupils were suddenly rimmed in red, glowing blood red. The smile from spring days long past was wiped from her face. "Ah...Oh...Ahhh!" she cried. "N-no...Don't make me do it, please...I'm not...!"

It took a moment for Lelouch to grasp the situation. But Euphemia's next words made everything clear. "I'm not going to do it, please...! I don't want to kill them...! No...!"

"Did I...?" gasped Lelouch.

"Oh...No, I don't want to...Such a..." Euphemia stepped back, trembling and staggering. She slumped to the ground, holding her shoulders as if trying to restrain something from leaping out of her.

"No, it can't be... Euphy!" Lelouch moved toward her but it was already too late.

Euphemia's shivering ceased. A vacuous, artificial smile appeared on her face. Euphemia said cheerfully, "You're right. I have to kill all the Japanese."

"I!"

C.C. had told Lelouch before that if he overused the power of geass, it would eventually consume him. Lelouch had seen the same thing happen to another geass user in the past.

"I've become like Mao! I can't control my geass power!" Lelouch's left eye glowed even brighter than Euphemia's eyes. It emitted a red, poisonous light. The geass emblem had surfaced and did not disappear.



Euphemia grabbed the needle gun lying discarded on the ground. "No, Euphy!" cried Lelouch. "Forget the order I just gave you!" It was too late. Lelouch's geass only worked once on a person. Euphemia stood up and began to run for the exit.

"Euphy!" Lelouch tried to grab her, but the pain throbbed through his left eye, causing him to grow dizzy and lose his balance. "W-wait, Euphy!"

Not wasting a moment, Euphemia turned around and dashed out of the bridge.

3

There is more than one road to tragedy. Regardless of whether the world is filled with kindness and charity, or clogged with evil and suffering, there are always causes to light the fuse of tragedy. Does the ignition happen by coincidence or by cause?

Either way, if sad stories happen even in a gentle world, where should we place our trust? In compassion—that should be the compass in our hearts on the journey toward happiness.



"Princess Euphemia?" Darlton asked as Euphemia returned to the ceremony arena.

I told her bodyguards to let us know as soon as her meeting with Zero was over!

Euphemia quickly ran past him. She hurried to the middle of the stage and grabbed the microphone.

"Those of you who call yourselves Japanese, I have a favor to ask." Her exceptionally cheerful voice echoed all over the stadium. "Could you all die, please?"

A hush fell over the boisterous stadium. They heard, but couldn't understand what the girl on the stage was saying. Then, somebody whispered, "...H-hey." And another, "What did she say?"

"Um..." before the crowd recovered, Euphemia tilted her head playfully. "I was hoping you would all commit suicide, but you can't, can you? Okay, soldiers," she continued with a huge smile on her face, "Please kill the Japanese! Kill them all!"

"What!?"

This time, the arena of people came to their senses, including Darlton. He leaped up from his chair in astonishment, kicking the chair away. "Cut the mics and cameras now!" he roared, as Euphemia raised her hand with the needle gun.

"!? Suzaku?" gasped Lelouch as he ran out of the G1 Base in pursuit of Euphemia. There on the ground was Suzaku, surrounded by Euphemia's bodyguards. C.C. was nowhere to be seen, but at the moment, that was the farthest thing from Lelouch's mind. Still, he took a moment to look at Suzaku, muttering, "He's just unconscious. But why?"

As long as he's alive, it's fine. There is something far more important than this...

As soon as he directed his attention back to his target, he heard the resounding call, "Kill them all!"

"!"

Gravely concerned, Lelouch bolted out of the entryway, and headed to the stage. He heard Darlton yell to cut the mics and cameras. He neared the end of the entryway. "Stop it, Euphy!" he cried. But as soon as he stepped onto the stage, he hit a thick human wall.

"Halt!" yelled the Britannian guards. They stopped Lelouch and held him back from going to Euphemia.

"Out of my way!" he shouted.

"Terrorist!" one spat. Lelouch struggled in vain to escape their strong arms. He grunted and raised his hand to his mask.

"Stand aside!" he commanded. He pushed the button that opened the shutter on his left eye. He intended to order them with the absolute power of geass, which still hadn't receded from his pupil.

Euphemia raised the needle gun and aimed at the front row of guests seated below the stage. The next moment, she passed the point of no return. The gunshot echoed as an elderly man slumped off the chair that he'd been sitting on. Euphemia stared at the needle stuck in his bloody chest with a joyful smile.

Everybody froze, silent.

"Ahhhh...!" cried a woman, possibly the elderly man's companion, who'd been sitting next to him. Her cry became the epicenter of the roars and screams that seized the stadium. Amidst the cries and shouts, Euphemia's extremely inappropriate voice boomed over the loudspeakers. "Come on soldiers, do your duty! Hurry up!"

"Princess Euphemia!" Darlton yelled out in a sharp, authoritative voice. Euphemia heard his thunderous voice even over the cacophony in the stadium. Euphemia turned to look in his direction.

"What on earth's come over you!? Please stop this at once Your Highness. This is—" Before he could finish, another gunshot rang out. "Wha...Argh!" Darlton groaned.

Under normal circumstances, he might have been able to dodge the bullet. But the person before him was Euphemia, a princess he had known since birth. He'd cared for and protected Cornelia and Euphemia his whole life.

The princess is about to shoot me? Impossible! he'd thought and that's why his response had been delayed.

"W-why?" he gasped. He doubled over, clutching his stomach wound. He couldn't hear what Euphemia said next.

"Forgive me General, but I mustn't let anyone stand in my way. I have to kill all the Japanese," Euphemia said, still cheery. Darlton tried to look up at her through blurry eyes, but instead

he collapsed in severe pain. She was smiling, but contrary to her expression, her eyes glistened with moisture.

Were they tears? Maybe they were residue from the tears she shed when she first received Lelouch's geass order inside the G1 Base and struggled to fight against it. Perhaps it was proof that the real Euphemia was still trying to resist the entity that possessed her. Nobody knew nor would ever know.

Euphemia looked away from Darlton as he finally hit the ground with a thud. "Now Britannian soldiers. This is an order. Kill the Japanese!"

What an unimaginable nightmare...

The curtain pulled away to reveal the opening act of a tragedy that no one had anticipated.

4

To their credit, the Britannian Forces were not too swift to execute the order that had been given. Euphemia's change of heart was entirely too strange, not to mention that she had shot Darlton. Her rank might have been higher than Darlton's, but she had not established the authority that a true soldier and chief commander like Darlton possessed. He was their leader and, as such, his orders bore the most weight. The soldiers might have immediately followed the directive if it came from Darlton; however, Euphemia's commands didn't mean as much to them. That's just the nature of the military. In the military, accomplishment speaks louder than ranking and social class. On top of that, even though they held the Japanese in contempt, they couldn't preemptively kill people who weren't causing violence of any kind.

Euphemia saw them not following her orders and turned back around to find a high-ranking officer in the middle of the stage. He stared at her.

"Why aren't you killing them?" she asked.

"Um, well... We can't..." he murmured.

"I see," Euphemia said to herself. "You're trying to stop me too, aren't you?" She raised the gun once again. The officer broke out in a cold sweat. Darlton was on the ground not twenty feet away. The officer suddenly grabbed his communication device and ordered, "All forces, I allow you to shoot. Kill the Elevens!"

"B-but, Company Commander...the General is..."

"T-that was an accident. No, this was the plan. Everything is going according to plan! Don't let any of these idealistic Elevens with their dreams of equality get away!"

"R-roger! All mobile units, rush the stadium."

Euphemia smiled as she listened to the Knightmares' start-up noises and the loud screams inside the stadium. She reached her hand out to the officer who had cut off the communication device.

"I'd like to use that," she said, looking at the officer's machine gun.

"Yes..." he whimpered.

"This weapon is no good. We need to kill more and more of them," she said, tossing away the needle gun.

The sounds of chaos woke Suzaku Kururugi. "Urgh..." he winced, shaking his aching head lightly. Suddenly his ears were inundated with screams, cries and gunfire. He gasped and looked around him. "W-what's going on...?"

The long-haired girl had disappeared, but all around him things were like out of a bad dream. He stood up, tottering in front of the G1 Base, with intentions of returning to the stadium where the sound of gunfire was coming from. Then, he opened his eyes.

Hell had been unleashed on earth. Numerous Britannian mobile units from the regular forces and the human-shaped Sutherlands stood in the stadium. Britannian soldiers stationed

themselves at the feet of the Knightmares and fired on the crowd. The gunshots kept coming. People fled from the gunfire, trying to escape. Children were crying, women were bawling, and people were cut down left and right in a flurry of blood. The rat-a-tat-tat of machine guns and rifles played out in an endless rhythm.

It took Suzaku a moment to come to his senses.

"Stop! What are you—" as Suzaku started to shout, a bullet drilled a hole in the nearby ground. Suzaku immediately hid behind a wall at the rear of the stage. He turned on the communication device attached to his ear and opened a public channel.

"All forces, this is Suzaku Kururugi, Knight of Honor of Britannia. What are you doing? Cease fire at once!" The response to that was more scattered gunfire and the menacing voice of a Britannian soldier.

"We've been ordered to kill all the Japanese here."

"What?" Suzaku yelled.

"Princess Euphemia issued the command herself."

Suzaku couldn't hide his astonishment. "Wh-what!? Princess Euphemia did!? No, that's absurd!"

"I don't know. You're Japanese, aren't you?"

"!"

As soon as Suzaku noticed that the Knightmare's bazooka was aimed at the wall behind him, he dashed away not a moment too soon. The bazooka fired. Suzaku rolled on the ground, blown by the blast from the explosion.

"This is a massacre. We are killing them all. All Japanese are to die, all of them!" repeated Euphemia as if she was singing, from the center of the stage. She fired randomly with the machine gun. Her white dress was already stained red with the blood of the very people who she supposedly wanted to protect, the Japanese. Some of the bodies below the stage were riddled with so many bullet

holes that their corpses looked like beehives. Their brains were scattered like so many chunks of fresh meat.

"Euphy, stop!!" Lelouch called out as he ran towards her, dodging the bullets, but she didn't hear him. It soon became impossible to keep running toward her, as he was the target of the Britannian soldiers.

"It's Zero!"

"Don't let him get away! He's a terrorist!"

Lelouch used geass to shut up the ones nearby and hid behind whatever he could to avoid ranged attacks. Maybe he could have ended the tragedy if he had used geass on all the soldiers. In fact, when the massacre had just begun, Lelouch made the Britannian soldiers he could incompetent. As the butchery continued, he realized that his geass could not put a stop to it. There were too many of them and many of the soldiers were in Knightmares where Lelouch couldn't get to them. Additionally, there was no way to stop Euphemia, the central figure of the assault.

"This...My geass did this..." Lelouch asked himself. He had thought that he comprehended how dangerous his power could be. *What a useless and horrible power this is! It can cause a tragedy but it can't be stopped!* What was happening was never a part of his plan, even before Euphemia won him over. He had planned to have her shoot Zero, and not even fatally at that. She'd be forced to leave politics but she would have ended up a traitor, not a murderer. Lelouch had also planned to somehow clear her disgrace once he reached his goal. But now, how many lives had she taken?

"Urgh!" Lelouch wanted to look away from the sight in front of him...He almost did. Then, he noticed someone pulling his cape. He looked down to see an old woman, her face covered in blood, grasped the end of Lelouch's cape with the last of her strength. She had already shed a critical amount of blood.

"Z-Zero...our savior..."

"!"

"You...are our only...hope."

Stop.

"Oh, please...please..."

Please stop.

"Japan...please save...Japan..."

I'm not your savior!

"Please...help..." the woman trailed off, the last of her energy used up. Her tear filled eyes lost focus and she let go of the cape but Lelouch could not move away. He felt that he was not allowed to run away from her.

"...Don't..." Lelouch stepped back, tottering. "Don't...force this responsibility on me...Must I atone for this sin? Is this a cross I have to bear too?" Though he spoke forceful words, his emotions were paralyzed. The loss of life before him was his doing. The tragedy was his fault and he would never be able to escape that...

"Argh!" he groaned again, turned back around, and jumped into a hall that led outside of the arena, where further slaughter was taking place. His body moved mechanically, without his heart.

Now that it has come to this...Lelouch repeated as he walked along the hallway, his hand on the wall to steady himself. He had to forcefully make himself believe that this was what he had planned from the beginning. Otherwise, he couldn't keep himself together.

Who am I? Zero. That's right, I'm Zero. I use cruel methods, fight with dirty tricks, kill anyone, and exploit anything I can in order to achieve my goals. That's right, that's who Zero is. This is what I wanted. This is what I had planned from the start.

It's going away.

The heart that Euphemia melted began to harden, the spring breeze he felt in her presence disappeared.

It's all going away...and nothing can be done to stop it.

It wasn't that he was losing his memories that quickly, it was that he had to choose to forget, or else. His gait became more sure-footed. Suddenly, a man appeared from a side corridor.

"Zero..." he said. "You son of a bitch. What did you do to Princess Euphemia...?" The large-framed man stumbled towards him, pressing a wound on his stomach where blood gushed out. He was a Britannian soldier, but not just any mere soldier. He wore a general's emblem on his collar. He was Andreas Darlton.

So, you're alive.

He was the closest of Cornelia's inner circle advisors. The moment the man tried to take a shooting stance, Lelouch reached up to the side of his mask and opened the left eye shutter almost unconsciously.

That's right. I'll exploit anything that's useful.

"What!? What's going on inside the stadium?" Kallen Kouzuki yelled from the cockpit of her Knightmare, the Guren Mk-II.

She and the rest of the Black Knights were secretly on standby in the nearby mountain forest, not far from the ceremony arena. Although Zero had stationed them there, they did not know why he had ordered them to do so. They knew something would happen but the situation in the stadium was beyond anyone's wildest guess. "What about Zero...?"

"We're trying to figure that out!"

Immediately after deputy commander Ohgi answered, an image popped up on all the Black Knights' communication panels, including the Guren Mk-II's. They were shown an event so tragic that they could barely force themselves to watch it. Kallen's eyes were wide as saucers as she stared at the feed in astonishment. "What is this? What's happening...?"

A signal overrode the footage. The code name was ZERO.

"This is my order to all Black Knights!"

"Zero!" It was the voice of the person Kallen trusted above all others. That voice got more attention from her than anything

else ever did, and that's why she noticed something peculiar in his address.

"Euphemia has become our enemy! The Specially Administrated Zone of Japan is a cowardly trap designed to lure us in!" The voice booming out of the communication panel spoke in Zero's usual authoritative tone; however, Kallen felt that something was off.

"All armored autonomous battle knight units, advance on the ceremony grounds and wage an attack! Wipe out all Britannian Forces! Save the Japanese! Hurry!"

For whatever reason, Kallen felt that the Zero on the other end of the communication device was more juvenile than the Zero that she knew. Zero led the Black Knights with composure and overflowing confidence. This Zero seemed to be a little child who was sobbing and stomping his feet in frustration because he'd seen something he didn't like.

"...and..." Lelouch continued. Kallen shook her head. *That voice is Zero's, and nobody else's.* "And if you find Euphemia, the third princess of the Britannian Empire..."

But still...

Kallen still couldn't shake off the thought.

"Get Lancelot ready!" Suzaku shouted at the Avalon. The floating airship was on standby."

"There is no way to get there without a Knightmare!"

"W-wait, Suzaku. Not in this situation..."

"I'll stop them. I'll make them stop! And Princess Euphemia, Euphy, I have to..."

No one would ever know whether it was a coincidence that both of them spoke in unison:

"...find her!"

"...kill her!"

Suzaku's and Lelouch's roars echoed as far their communication devices would carry.

5

This is so dull.

Euphemia tossed away the machine gun with its empty magazine drearily. *This thing isn't any good, either. I have to get ahold of a better one that kills more. See, there are so many more Japanese out there to kill. They're still moving. There are more coming. I have to kill more and more and more.*

Euphemia looked around, blood splattered across her face. A giant machine stood next to her, its engine rumbling as it shot from the assault rifle attached near its waist. Euphemia trotted toward the giant machine, calling out, "Excuse me, you on the Gloucester?"

"Yes, Your Highness..." said the Knightmare pilot, ceasing fire and turning toward her. Euphemia continued happily, "Could you please come down from the cockpit?"

The massacre was still taking place. Over ten thousand Japanese had already lost their lives. These were people who had come to the Japan Special Zone with hope in their hearts, who believed in Euphemia. Thanks to a careless statement made by Lelouch, Euphemia had been forced to go against all she believed and order their execution.

Though they'd been hesitant at first, the Britannian soldiers soon fell prey to bloodlust. The sight of blood does things to people. A sensible person might deny the truth of that, but seeing red blood spilled awakens a primal nature in human beings. Besides, there was no commander to take charge. The acting commander in chief, Darlton, was missing in action. The highest-ranking person, Euphemia, had become entirely self-absorbed. Unsupervised, the troops quickly got out of control.

"Ha ha ha ha! What equality? Huh!?"

"Die, die! Die, you damned Elevens, die!"

Although a few people tried to provide voices of reason, they were drowned out with accusations of insubordination. The brutality of the attack twisted the soldiers' minds into those of ravenous predators, which in turn led to more cruelty. The banquet of blood showed no signs of stopping. The violence spread, multiplying the very kind of scene that Euphemia had sought to prevent with her proposal of the Special Zone. The massacre finally expanded out into the crowds of Japanese gathered outside the stadium. People ran around, screaming and yelling. As they fled, they saw even more Knightmares charging towards them.

Were they Britannian reinforcements? People stopped in place, frozen in despair. A moment later, their cries for help exploded into joyful cheers. The squad of Knightmares advancing on them were not Sutherlands or Gloucesters, but mobile units painted black, darker than night.

"It's the Black Knights!"

"Zero! Zero has come to save us!"

"Hurry, this way!"

Upon the Black Knights' arrival, the Britannian Forces emerged from their crazed barbarism. They were still well-trained warriors. What stood before them now were not the sheep they had just been slaughtering, but wolves with fangs just like them. The pack of bloodthirsty predators reformed as one army. The platoon leader came back to his senses first, scolded and halted any of his subordinates who were still hunting, and urged them to assemble a formation against the enemy Knightmares.

Right as they were trying to form up, gunfire echoed from behind Britannian lines. Several Sutherlands were completely destroyed—by the assault rifles of other Sutherlands.

"What on earth are you doing, you fools!?" yelled the platoon leader into his communication panel. He swung his machine

around. One Sutherland that had shot down its fellow Sutherlands aimed its rifle at the platoon leader and fired.

"What!?" he shrieked incredulously.

"The Black Knights fight for the sake of justice," said the Sutherland's pilot mechanically as he unloaded his rounds into the commander's cockpit. "They are just, so I must fight on their side." His eyes pupils were rimmed in red.

He was under the sway of Lelouch's geass. Lelouch's original plan called for Euphemia to shoot him and then have the Black Knights descend on the stadium to save him. In order for that to happen, the Black Knights would have had to overcome the Britannian Knightmares. So Lelouch had evened the odds by using his geass on a few soldiers prior to the ceremony, with the thought of spreading chaos during the fight.

As the Black Knights had indeed shown up, the geass controlled pilots started to shoot independently. The Black Knights immediately noticed the strange behavior.

"Now's our chance! Enter the stadium!"

"Damn Britannians..."

"Euphy!" Suzaku cried from Lancelot. He hurled out of the Avalon directly to the ceremony venue, where fierce battles between the Britannian Forces and the Black Knights already raged. Some of the Black Knights noticed the approaching Lancelot on their heat sensors and started firing on it.

"Get away from me! I don't have time to waste on you!" Suzaku navigated the float unit left and right, up and down to dodge the bullets while descending upon the area. He zoomed in with telephoto mode. "Euphy, where are you!!?"

The first to enter the stadium was the Black Knights' Nightmare Zero Squad, led by Kallen's Guren Mk-II.

"Attack!" At Kallen's order, all the Knightmares engaged the remaining Britannian Forces, although at that point, the battle might as well have been called over. The Britannian Forces were completely out of control, in no small part because they were shooting each other. Kallen and her subordinate Knightmares cleaned up the place as easily as if they were mowing a lawn.

Then, Kallen noticed a Gloucester that seemed to be pay no attention to her or the Black Knights. The rogue unit kept shooting at the Japanese who were too late to escape.

"Stop it!" Ignited by pure rage, Kallen zoomed toward the Gloucester and disarmed the enemy unit with a swipe of her left hand. The Gloucester wobbled and the pilot called out over the external speaker, "Ngh! Are you Japanese? You dare raise a hand against Euphemia li Britannia?"

What? Kallen couldn't believe what she was hearing. Her very soul smoldered with hatred and wrath.

"Aha! So there you are, you ridiculous royal puppet...!"

You...did this?

"Now," she said as the Guren charged its radiant wave surger, "suffer the hand of vengeance—" Right as Kallen was about to launch her hand at the Gloucester, a voice shouted, "Wait!"

"Huh?"

"I'll deal with her," said the voice, which Kallen realized was coming from above her. It belonged to Zero, in his large black Knightmare, Gawain. Before Kallen could say anything else, Gawain's hands released their slash harkens. They pinned Euphemia's Gloucester easily. Euphemia was not as talented a pilot as Kallen or Suzaku. The Gloucester's limbs were sliced off like butter and the pieces collapsed to the ground. The cockpit was left unscathed.

Once the Gloucester was destroyed, the cockpit hatch opened up and a girl tottered out of it. She wasn't merely fleeing. In her hands was a machine gun, possibly the one installed in the cockpit.

"You defiant Japanese!" She had the gun at the ready, still unsteady on her feet. She started shooting at Gawain. "I have to kill them all! These Japanese people, they have to die!"

Lelouch, under the mask, clenched his jaw. I did this. I made her this way. She's not Euphemia anymore. This isn't my kindhearted stepister who was like a spring breeze. I destroyed everything.

Soon Euphemia's machine gun ran out of bullets. Of course, Gawain suffered no damage from her barrage. Machine guns meant for humans had no more effect than a water balloon on Knightmares.

"Why now? I need bullets to kill!" She sank her hand into the cockpit and searched for a replacement magazine.

"What now, Zero? Should we take her prisoner?" Kallen asked Lelouch, through the Guren Mk-II's communication panel. Kallen's voice had lost its furious edge. Euphemia's bizarre, reckless behavior must have given her pause. "There's no point. Leave her," Lelouch answered darkly.

There's nothing that can be done anymore...

Opening the cockpit of Gawain, Lelouch headed for the ground. "Zero! That's dangerous!" Kallen said in surprise, concerned for his safety. But that showed how little she knew about the situation. The order Lelouch had given Euphemia with his geass was to "kill all the Japanese." The man beneath the mask was not Japanese and Euphemia was well aware of that.

He stepped down to the ground using the cord.

"I have to kill them..." Euphemia finally found a replacement magazine and raised her machine gun. Then she tilted her head in question when she saw Zero.

"Oh, I thought you were Japanese. So I was thinking, we could run the Specially Administrated Zone of Japan together. Oh wait...Japan?" Her words had no consistency. There were two different Euphemias coexisting: the one who had been twisted forcefully by Lelouch and the one who still remembered about

the Special Zone. This fact made Lelouch's soul freeze down to the core again. He was devastated.

"Yes. I would have liked that," Lelouch restrained himself from clenching his teeth. He inserted his hand into his chest pocket. He pulled out a gun. "You and I together."

I'm running away. Something inside him, maybe his heart, shouted at him. He aimed his gun directly at Euphemia.

Farewell, Euphy... You may have been the first girl I ever loved, he said to himself as he put his finger on the trigger.

"There she is!"

Lancelot captured the scene below with perfect clarity but Suzaku couldn't comprehend the tableau he saw.

"Z-Zero?" In the ruined ceremony area, a man in a black mask pointed a gun at Euphemia. She didn't move away and then...

A gunshot.

The next moment, the girl, Suzaku's irreplaceable light...

...fell like a flower petal fluttering to the ground. The moment Lelouch shot her, he knew he saw the sinister red glow in her eyes disappear for a split second. The moment the merciless bullet penetrated her body, the light flickered off.

"Why...?" Euphemia said, her lips mouthing "Lelouch" as she fell.

"!"

Another crack split Lelouch's heart. Suddenly, a white knight descended from the sky at top speed.

"NOOOOO!!!"

"Suzaku!?"

Dodging all the artillery fire, Lancelot landed between Lelouch and Euphemia. Lelouch was blown back by the strong wind and lost his balance but Lancelot didn't care at all. As soon

as it landed, it crouched to pick up Euphemia, and then blasted off again.

"Suzaku!" yelled Kallen. She tried to halt Lancelot but she didn't stand a chance this time. Though their machines were evenly matched, Suzaku had never had a stronger reason to fight.

Lancelot swung the arm not holding Euphemia toward the Guren Mk-II. "Get out of my way!!!" With that one punch, he nearly toppled Kallen. It was his spirit that overwhelmed the Guren Mk-II rather than the unit's power and abilities.

"Dammit...!" Kallen and the Guren Mk-II toppled toward the ground. In the split second before she could regain her balance, Lancelot leapt up and disappeared into the sky.



Lelouch followed Lancelot with his eyes for a moment. Inside the mask, the geass sigil remained on his left eye as if the mark of Cain had been stamped there. Soon, Lelouch swirled around and returned to the black Nightmare. He climbed up on the cord and returned to the cockpit. He was greeted by C.C.'s admonishing.

"Shouldn't you go after him?" she said, sitting in the front pilot seat with the control stick in her hand. She looked completely collected, quite different from the quivering mass she'd been in front of Suzaku earlier. The geass sigil on her forehead had since vanished. C.C. hadn't said anything to Lelouch—what had happened to her wasn't that important. She was only reacting to the conditions of her contractor. The source of the abnormality was within Lelouch. For C.C., the consequences were only temporary.

"...no need," Lelouch answered quietly. "The bullet hit a fatal area. No human could survive that." He sounded somewhat mechanical.

"That's not what I meant..." C.C. started say, but then thought better of it. Instead she asked, "What are you going to do now?"

"As planned," Lelouch answered yet in a dry voice, "I'm going to exploit Euphemia's death to the utmost. Thanks to Diethard's work, everything that happened here has been televised all over the world. Now Britannia has become a nation of evil. I'm going to capitalize on this fact."

"You mean..."

"I planned for this outcome already. Tell the Black Knight squads to protect the surviving Japanese and meet up in the stadium. There, Zero who fights against the inhumane Britannians, will make an announcement to everyone." Lelouch used the name "Zero" as if it was somebody else.

"....."

"There's not much time. Cornelia's in the Tokyo Settlement, and she must have seen the news by now. She'll have started making her own moves. Hurry C.C."

"...Got it." She didn't ask, "Are you sure you want to do that?"

Holding a bloodstained Euphemia, Suzaku Kururugi ran into the Avalon as soon as he docked. The girl's arms and legs hung limply. Her eyes were closed and her fair skin was losing its color rapidly...

The situation seemed hopeless, but still Suzaku ran. He ran with all the strength he had left. The door to the infirmary slid open. Cecile gasped and covered her mouth with her hands. Even Lloyd, who usually lacked in prudence, grimly stared at the tragedy on their doorstep.

"Please!" Suzaku shouted desperately. "Please, you have to save Euphy!"

CODE GEASS
 コードギアス
 反逆のルージュ
Lelouch
 of the Rebellion

SUNSET

December 2017, Area 11

What? Euphemia li Britannia thought, as she stared at the luscious green scenery around her.

Brilliant sunshine flooded the large garden. It was a familiar garden, the one at her mother's palace, where she had grown up. Euphemia's curiosity as to her sudden arrival there was deepened by the mystery of a small girl running past her.

"Big sister!"

The little girl's curly hair bounced playfully as she tromped across the thick lawn, her arms pumping as fast as they would go. She ran so fast that she damaged the hem of her skirt. She'd be scolded by her mother for sure! But the girl didn't seem to notice. She was far too enveloped in a game of tag with her big sister, an older girl who had taken time between her lessons to play with her.

"Eep!" The little girl's voice sharply rose as she tripped and fell. "Ouch! Ow..."

Oh, no! Don't cry, Euphemia encouraged. You'll be okay. The ground isn't very hard at all, and even though you fell, you didn't seriously hurt anything. Get on up. You can do it.

"Nnnhh!" The little girl's big eyes filled with tears. A big girl's hand came to comfort her.

"Are you alright, Euphy?" The older girl lifted up the little body with her strong, gentle hands. She held the little girl to her chest firmly and warmly. "You've got to be more careful."

"Wahh, wahh! Big sister!"

"Shh, your big sister is here. So don't cry. When you cry, you make me feel sad."

"Wahh...I'm sorry."

"Don't worry, everything's fine."

No, that won't do.

My big sister is too kind. If you keep treating me like this, I'll never grow up. Your protection is still what I relied on even after I got older, quit school and accepted the position of sub-viceroy to Area 11. It was there, even as I chose Suzaku as my knight and tried to establish the Specially Administrated Zone of Japan.

I see.

Euphemia finally realized what she was seeing. It was a dream. She'd had this nostalgic dream before, in moments when she'd felt helpless and had nothing better to think of. She'd never seen the dream so vividly before.

In the dream, little Euphy spoke to her sister again.

"Big sister, will you protect Euphy?"

"Yes. Along with the knight you choose someday, I will always protect you."

"Kn..."

"Knight. Your knight. One day a noble knight will dedicate his life to you."

"Oh...Will my knight be stronger than Andre?"

"Ha ha, well if he's as strong as Darlton, then you won't have to worry about a thing. Your knight needs to be stronger than even me."

"But Andre said you would become stronger than him someday."

"Well, if that's true, it's going to be very hard to find you a knight. Nothing less will do..."

The two sisters chatted happily under the bright sun, endless conversations brimming on their tongues, endless smiles bowing their lips. Euphemia smiled too.

Yes.

That's how things should be between us. We haven't been getting along well lately, but it's just temporary. We're letting our goals get in the way of our relationship. So, let's talk again, big sister. Let's spend more time talking about Suzaku, the Specially Administrated Zone, our thoughts, our wishes. Let's be honest with each other.

Then, someday, we'll talk about Lelouch and Nunnally...



She saw a white ceiling.

Still confused at the transition and wondering what had happened, Euphemia weakly opened her eyes. She knew she'd woken from her dream but she still felt dizzy. It was impossible to keep her thoughts from fraying. An attempt to get up got no traction whatsoever—she was unable to move. And what was that in front of her? Glass? She was inside a capsule...but why?

She found she could move her neck a bit. Craning it to the side, she spied Suzaku. Was that Major Lloyd Asplund and Lieutenant Cecile Croomy from ASEEC behind him? And there were others there too, in white gowns...

"...."

Suzaku, who was right next to her, moved his lips. The capsule closed out his words and she couldn't hear him very well. Only by reading his lips did she understand what he was repeating. Her name, Euphy.

Cecile, who for some reason was averting her eyes, reached out and pressed some kind of button on the wall. The capsule opened slowly. Oh, she thought, now I'll be able to hear his voice.

"Euphy..."

Suzaku's voice was still so hard to hear. Why was that? Was there something wrong with her eardrums? Cecile asked Lloyd and others to leave the room with her. After the door closed again, she and Suzaku were alone.

"Euphy."

His voice was so far away that it frustrated her. She loved to hear the warmth in his voice when he called her name. She didn't want to struggle to be able to hear it. Very soon, she wouldn't have to, she knew. Things were about to be okay. Any day the Britannian Empire would issue a statement explaining that she'd renounced her claim to the Imperial throne. After that, she wouldn't have to worry about anyone criticizing him when he called her name like that. She'd be able to hear it all the time, anywhere.

"S...Suzaku..." Euphemia stuttered. She didn't notice the weakness of her own voice, much as she remained oblivious to the multiple blood transfusion tubes connected to her immobile body.

"Euphy..." Suzaku repeated. Euphemia wondered what had happened to her to make Suzaku look so sad.

"Why...did you give that order...?"

Order?

"What are you...talking about?"

Suzaku blinked in surprise.

"Euphy. You don't remember anything...?"

Of course, Suzaku had no way of knowing what had really happened. Neither did Euphemia. However, Suzaku had personally been a recipient of the same supernatural force that was to blame for Euphemia's current condition.

Lelouch's geass gave him the power to issue absolute commands. No one had the ability to deny his orders. As a side effect, the receiver of the command forgot what they did during the command, as well as right before and after the geass was put into effect. It was the same as when Lelouch put his geass on Suzaku at Kamine Island.

"Never mind that..." Euphemia rasped. "Suzaku...you're Japanese, aren't you...?"

"Y... Yeah."

For a moment, Euphemia's pupils flashed red. The geass order to kill every Japanese person was still in effect. The unfortunate power tried to command her soul to commit another atrocity. But...

"No."

"Euphy...?"

"I mustn't. I can't even think such a thing...!"

Euphemia squeezed her eyes tight shut. She needed all the power she could muster to drive back a mysterious sensation that was coursing through her body. She didn't know what it was but she knew that, without fail, she had to suppress its monstrous urgings.

Then, a miracle happened.

Gradually, the sensation subsided. Had she rejected the power of geass through willpower? That seemed unlikely, as the order had been written into her mind and soul. But seeing as how her soul, which should have been the almighty anchoring tree of her being, was already fading into the ether, so too did the power of geass fade.

"Suzaku..."

Relieved to be free of that malignant sensation, Euphemia asked, "The ceremony...did it go alright? Is Japan okay?"

Suzaku couldn't believe what he was hearing from the woman before him.

"Euphy, don't you remember anything...?"

People who had been lucky enough to survive the battle gathered near the stage of what remained of the ceremonial arena.

The Black Knights' Nightmares stood among them, offering protection. The crowd roared with applause when the Black Knights' leader, Zero, took center stage. Bolstered by the audience's chants of "Zero!", the black-caped man of the hour approached

a microphone, all traces of emotion tucked away behind his trademark black mask.

"People of Japan! And all who are oppressed by the Empire of Britannia!"

Even louder cheers responded to his dignified call.

"Long have I waited! All through the struggles against Britannia's injustices, I have waited for them to come to their senses. But that hope was betrayed by an act of barbarism that can only be called genocide!"

The purity of the piercing blue sky mocked what only Lelouch, under Zero's mask, knew to be a charade.

"The third princess of the Britannian Empire, Euphemia, used her sweet talk about the Specially Administrated Zone of Japan to mislead the Japanese and she committed a violent massacre that turned our hopes into bottomless despair!"

"That's right! She's a coward!" someone in the crowd yelled in response to Zero's speech. Others joined in.

"Never forgive Euphemia!"

"Some merciful princess she is! She's a filthy witch!!!"

"Liar!"

Their sentiments were justified, considering the circumstances, but Lelouch, under the mask of Zero, couldn't wholeheartedly accept them.

"Yes! Euphemia is the very symbol of Britannia's hypocrisy! A murderer cloaked in the flag of a nation!!!"

"I hope that bitch burns in hell!"

"You can't deceive us any more!"

"Death to Britannia!!!"

The anger and hatred rose to a fever pitch, uncontrollable by those who instigated the incident, and who had never wanted things to go such a way.

Meanwhile, Euphemia's time was running out.

"Did I...do okay...?" Euphemia asked, her eyes still closed. "How about everyone who was there? Are the Japanese...happy?"

Suzaku winced. Though his reddened eyes were already leaking large tears, he pushed himself to answer.

"Euphy...The Special Zone is," he smiled, "a great success! The Japanese people were given back their home. And you did it."

The words elicited a smile from the princess, giving color to the deathly pallor of her chalk-white face.

"Thank god..." Euphemia's eyes flickered open. Something was wrong because now not only were sounds muffled, but she couldn't see either. And on top of that, she was very cold, even freezing.

"How...strange..."

Euphemia weakly raised her hand into the darkness.

"I can't see...your face...anymore."

"Nnh...!"

Yes, something was wrong. It was cold all around her, and so dark. She couldn't even see the face of the person who mattered more to her than anyone else, and that saddened her. She rallied her spirits knowing that he was happy for her. He'd praised her for what she'd done and his encouragement always gave her strength.

"Euphy!"

Ahh...

Right there. *This is warmth. This is Suzaku. This is Suzaku's hand.* She was sure. It was only her imagination that something was wrong. Suzaku was by her side and holding her hand. That made Euphemia smile again. Though, if she could, she would stop depending on him so much. She'd grown and couldn't fall back on him, no matter how happy his support made her. That was why she'd chosen him as her knight and why...Oh...

She needed to tell Suzaku something.

"Keep going..."

"Huh?"

"...to school..."

She commanded so much of his time. When things were settled, she wanted Suzaku to go back to school. It was important and necessary for him.

"I...had to stop...before I...had the chance...to finish..."

"E...Euphy..."

Suzaku clung to her hand so tightly he might have hurt her.

"Euphy, you can still go yourself. I know! Why don't we go to Ashford Academy together? The student council is so much fun. Euphy..."

"Ha ha...You'll have to do it...for me..."

Her pain ebbed, taking the cold with it. Euphemia felt sleepy. Was that the calming effect of Suzaku's comforting hands on her own? She felt so relaxed.

"! Please, Euphy! No! Don't go!"

I'm not going anywhere Suzaku. You gave me this warmth. You gave me these feelings.

Oh...

I'm sorry, sister.

In the end, he really is the one I love. I want to be protected by him. I want to protect him. I want you to understand some day. No, someday I'll tell you. I will.

Your sister, Euphemia, chose this man, to follow her dreams with...

"Suzaku...I'm...so happy we..."

She couldn't keep going. Her last strength exhausted, Euphemia's lips stopped moving. Her white hand fell limp in Suzaku's hands.

".....!!!"

The boy's inarticulate screams reverberated through the medical facility.

11:39AM, December 10, 2017

The girl who was the light to Suzaku Kururugi, and could become the light for many others, closed her eyes forever.

CODE GEASS
 コドギアス
 反逆のルージュ
Lelouch
 of the Rebellion

STAGE-4:3-ZERO

To describe it in short, a mandala is a microcosm of the universe. However, that description doesn't do it justice. Mandala originally meant enlightenment, and derives from the act of understanding the essence of everything. By achieving understanding of the essence, enlightenment is complete and, hence, like a circle. Therefore, mandala could also be translated as "circular path." Either way, it is the final destination of those who seek the truth, but at the same time a place they can never reach.

December 2017, Area 11

1

"I hereby declare our independence from Britannia! But don't take this to mean the resurrection of your fallen nation. We will not turn back the hands of time! The new Japan we go on to build shall be one broad enough to accept all peoples, histories and ideologies. Where the strong shall not reign over the weak! And it shall be called the United States of Japan!"



The footage of Euphemia's massacre, edited by the Black Knights' chief of operations Diethard, as well as Zero's subsequent speech, played continuously on TV thanks to Diethard's pirated frequencies.

After giving instructions to his officers Ohgi, Tohdoh and Kallen, Lelouch made his way to the G1 Base they'd obtained from the Britannian army. The Black Knights would be using it as their temporary headquarters. No sooner had he entered the room than a long-haired girl addressed him from near a large bank of windows.

"Do you plan to assault the Tokyo Settlement?" C.C. inquired.

"...Yes." Lelouch began removing Zero's mask. "This is the best chance we'll get. The public's anti-Britannian fervor is at an all-time high. I expected this to happen, and already distributed a manual with our strategic plans to the branch organizations in advance."

"But Tokyo is the seat of the government..." C.C. began.

"We can handle it. Did you forget how easily the Black Knights ousted the Britannian army at the ceremony, C.C.?"

"Then?" she countered.

"We haven't been able to engage Cornelia's elite guard. They're probably guarding the government bureau. But I already have a contact who will get us into the settlement..." As his mask came off, Lelouch swiveled his head away from C.C. and planted a hand over his left eye. He'd almost forgotten that his eye still glowed with a geass power he couldn't control. Red light filtered through his fingers.

C.C. shook her head. "Don't worry about it. Your geass has no effect on me. You know that, don't you?"

"That's true, isn't it?" Lelouch uncovered his left eye. "With my geass out of control now, I can never see anyone but you..." Following that pained statement, Lelouch walked over and sat down on a bed by the wall. He placed Zero's mask on it and clasped his hands over his knees. At first, C.C. watched silently but then asked him, "Alright, so you can't switch off your geass. Are there any other changes you've noticed?"

Lelouch shook his head. "Not really, but..."

"But?"

"Euphy...she tried to resist my orders."

C.C.'s arched her thin eyebrows.

"It was just for a moment, but she refused. She said she didn't want to kill them. That's never happened before..." Lelouch's orders were absolute. Every human being on earth was supposed to obey without hesitation. Even Suzaku had complied without hesitation. But Euphemia had tried to reject it. Because the situation had been so chaotic, Lelouch hadn't been able to ponder it at the time. Now he haltingly tried to express his conclusion. "I was wondering if my power had weakened. But, I think..."

"....."

"...such a malignant command...was simply against her nature."

He felt a slight vibration underfoot as the G1 Base crawled into action. Their new headquarters was already en route to the Tokyo Settlement with the Black Knights' main forces. The NAC representatives, Kyoto, who temporarily opposed Lelouch over the issue of the Specially Administrated Zone of Japan had fled back to his protection. A decisive step toward the accomplishment of Lelouch's long-held goal was being made. Everything was in place for Lelouch to deliver his first blow on the path to the obliteration of the Emperor Charles zi Britannia's Holy Empire. Yet, there was no joy in it for Lelouch.

C.C. broke the pregnant silence. "And so?"

"I guess that's all." Lelouch leaned his forehead upon his clasped hands. "It was something..." He choked up.

If...his heart whimpered. If there are no extenuating circumstances involved in the action of taking someone's life, but instead elements of absolute evil...then, doesn't that mean killing equals taking away someone's possibilities? It doesn't matter if you're at war or what the circumstances are. Taking away the possibilities someone has or had, and ignoring their will—that's murder.

To be certain, when he pointed his gun at her, Euphemia had already passed the point of no return. He was responsible for pushing her to that point, and that's why he chose to pull the trigger. He stopped Kallen and took her life himself. He didn't want Euphemia, the girl who was only trying to make the world a better place for him, and Nunnally to have to witness the hellish fallout of her actions or any further tragedy.

But now that the heat of the moment had passed, he knew that to be a rationalization. The one he'd really been seeking to spare from further shock was himself. Once he calmed down, he realized it wasn't Euphemia who feared seeing hell. It was Lelouch himself. He couldn't bear to see what she had become—made

worse by the fact that he had made her that way. Witnessing her behavior was like a window into hell for Lelouch. His heart and soul heaved. He shot her, not for her sake, but to protect his own precious ego. But with that gesture, Lelouch took away all of Euphemia's future possibilities.

Euphemia might have passed the point of no return, but it should have been up to her to decide not return, rather than having the path blocked by someone else. No one had the right or authority to do so. Even if Euphemia's future was hopeless, it was her right to discover that fact and eliminate the possibilities herself. However, Lelouch had bypassed her rights. Not only had his carelessness instigated the disaster, but he had also committed the inhumane act of disrespecting her and completely destroying Euphemia just to protect his own soul. He could never be forgiven, not even if he was lauded by the masses for eternity or worshipped as the messiah who eradicated the oppressive Britannian regime from Japan.

He suddenly became aware of C.C., who was standing nearby. Though she betrayed no emotions as usual, she reached out to embrace Lelouch. She clutched his ebony head to her chest and said, "We have our contract. I promise to stay with you until the very end."

She was the one person who had always claimed to share the burden of his guilt. The geass power she provided him had almost overwhelmed him, and an understanding of that was bound up in their embrace. Lelouch didn't push her away.

He couldn't.



Their last bastion of hope was destroyed.

The Japanese people's anger exploded after learning Euphemia, their star of hope, was actually a harbinger of grotesque bloodshed. Seven years of oppression under the thumb of Britannia

found its expression in outrage against the incident at the ceremony. A people stripped of their freedom, whose very name had been trod upon, grew powerful in their hatred and revolted wildly. After losing that last bastion of hope named Euphemia, their fury spread across the land with a virulent passion.

A chain of riots sprouted across Area 11. Not all of the rioters were rebels. While some supported the Black Knights, disenchanted Euphemia supporters were just as riled up. Though they opposed Britannia's colonial control, they'd been against the armed resistance. Now everyone grabbed stones and sticks and joined the riots. The conflicts grew so widespread that Area 11's Britannian Forces couldn't control them.

The military normally didn't maintain a force large enough to deal with the possibility of a mass uprising, in which the populace no longer cared for the safety of their lives or estates. Except during war times, the military couldn't afford to maintain the staff or equipment needed to quell a large-scale rebellion. No more than six hundred thousand soldiers were stationed in Area 11. In comparison, the number of Japanese people living in Area 11 surpassed one hundred fifty million. Only a third of the populace needed to participate in the uprising to match the presence of the occupation forces. Furthermore, the six hundred thousand Britannian soldiers weren't concentrated in one place that could become a stronghold, and riots were occurring across all of Area 11. The Britannian army usually functioned as a deterrent and peace keeping force. Only a public fearful for their lives and property saw a general peace keeping force as a deterrent, though.

Several uprisings concentrated around various settlements. Fierce battles waged between the army and anti-Britannian forces. However, they didn't last long. No matter how much force the military used, the people would not back down and so the rioters began to overtake parts of the settlements. For seven years, Britannia had acted as a conqueror, cordoning off their residential areas to anyone without a permit. But during the uprising, the conquered people of Japanese reentered their own land.

The rage and passion felt by the Japanese at the time can be observed in their writings on the incident:

"...There was a Britannian soldier lying on the ground and pointing his gun at me. As soon as he pulled the trigger, a friend of mine bashed in his head. I whispered, 'That was so easy.' Ever since the war, we Japanese had been afraid of Britannians like they were demons or something. We quaked in our boots if one even raised their voice at us. But we'd been afraid of nothing. It was all an illusion. We weren't in *Britannia*—they were in *Japan*! Britannians are neither demons nor monsters. If God was on anyone's side, it was ours."

"...There was nothing we couldn't do. We'd been right all along and Britannia was completely evil. That's why they could do anything. (omission) If anybody wants to call me evil for what I did, I say let 'em. They'll learn soon enough that they're wrong. Yes, I'll kill anything that's Britannian, even newborn babies... Anyone who shares even a drop of blood with that Massacre Princess Euphemia, the devil's own, should die..."

"...The air was boiling with hatred and anger. Nobody could stop it. Not the Britannians and not the Japanese. Someone hung a man's body, stabbed countless times, on the tree in front of my house. He wasn't even Britannian, he was Japanese. But he'd been selling information and betraying his own people. I don't sympathize with him for who he was, but one of the people who cut his throat was my neighbor lady. She lost her husband three years ago because of him. I'll never forget, yesterday she gave me fresh vegetables. I remember the smile on her face when she told me that she'd been able to get some Chinese cabbage and would I like to taste it? Her face was full of malice when she cut his throat. I'll never forget those two facial expressions..."

The hatred exhibited by the populace toward Britannia was a wave upon which Zero and the Black Knights rode towards the Tokyo

Settlement, Area 11's center. Of course, the uprising generally helped Zero and the Black Knights, but the rebellion was a double-edged sword for two reasons.

The first was political: Like with any other revolutionary movement, the party attempting to overthrow the status quo justifies their actions by condemning defects in the current system. In this case, the defect observed by Zero and the Black Knights was the atrocity committed by the Britannian army at the Specially Administrated Zone of Japan under Euphemia's orders. It was a perfect example of the one-sided oppression by the strong over the weak that the Black Knights had always stood against. As stated in Zero's speech, the Black Knights existed to bring justice to bear in such lopsided circumstances. However, the Japanese people's passionate and excessive demonstration of vitriol toward Britannia threatened to undermine the righteousness of the rebel's claim. As violence across the settlements increased, and not just rebels but ordinary people hunted down and degraded Britannians, the moral grounds of Zero's revolutionary ideals would become tainted.

The other reason was military. As established, the Tokyo Settlement was the center of Britannian control in Area 11. Naturally, the other settlements paled in comparison to the Tokyo Settlement's defensive capabilities. Thanks to Lelouch's geass, decisive victory awaited the Black Knights at the perimeter of the settlement. However, after that they would need to contend with forces waiting deep inside the settlement. The Black Knights' greatest adversary remained—Cornelia's forces. Furthermore, after they'd seized all areas of the settlement, it would be imperative that they quickly declare independence, and try to recover order. If they let the riots burn themselves out, the independence of their new nation would falter. It's a fact that the most difficult work facing a revolutionary government is not annihilating the old system, but recovering order from the chaos the new order once heralded as birth pangs. The new government needed to establish itself as a source of lawfulness. In addition to being prepared to shepherd

its citizenship, the Black Knights would need to immediately prepare for Britannian retaliation. It followed that Britannia would try to win its colony back, likely calling in reinforcements from neighboring areas as well as the homeland. As long as the land was in turmoil, the mass hysteria of the people threatened to complicate war strategy. Although effective at generating the energy needed to destroy the ruling class, the people's anger prevented the formation of an orderly nation. Like red-hot embers following a spectacular blaze, the temper of the Japanese people would not cool for some time. Trying to build a nation amidst sparking embers would be wholly ineffective. Throughout history, leaders who had succeeded in toppling the old system were soon toppled themselves by unrestrained chaos among their people. Someone who used the lower classes to rise to power had to be a master of the populace's passion, so that the masses could at least be quieted as the new government ascended to its position. Anyone who failed to gain mastery over the people would disappear from history's stage no sooner than they had taken it.

Considering these circumstances, as well as his personal situation, Zero forbid the Black Knights and their citizen allies from assaulting or otherwise committing atrocities against regular Britannians once they invaded the Tokyo Settlement. Anyone who disobeyed this edict was to be imprisoned and tried in accordance with the Black Knights' regulations. The declaration was sure to have an effect, but just how much effect would have to be observed. It wasn't only the newly joined citizen recruits. A number of the Black Knights themselves were outraged by the incident at the ceremony for the Specially Administrated Zone of Japan, and seemed unable to control their own rage against anything Britannian. Lelouch had gone above and beyond in creating righteous anger, though to his credit, he never intended to.

The clock struck midnight.

Before the Black Knights began their assault on the Tokyo Settlement's outer perimeter, the composite walls of the settlement,

built for earthquake protection and defense, suddenly collapsed. This seeming act of God was actually the result of Lelouch using his geass on a Britannian operator much earlier, commanding him to purge the platform system upon hearing a key word.

"Okay, now! All squads, charge!" yelled frontline commander Kyoshiro Tohdoh directing his forces, who were brimming with anger towards a discomfited Britannian army.



"Citizens, please evacuate to your nearest designated evacuation centers immediately. Please don't be alarmed. This chaos is temporary. Please follow the instruction of all military personnel and immediately—" The TV anchor's reassuring statements fizzled to static before cutting out completely.

"Now all the TV stations are out ..." whispered Milly Ashford. A group of students had gathered in Ashford Academy's student council room, located in the center of the Tokyo Settlement. An uncharacteristic gloom darkened the face of Milly. Fellow student council members Rivalz Cardmonde, Shirley Fenette, and Nunnally Lamperouge were also in the room.

"It's going to be okay," Rivalz encouraged, though his words rang hollow. "We have Viceroy Cornelia on our side. They've also said on TV that Prince Schneizel is coming from the homeland with reinforcements."

I hope he makes it before it's too late... Milly didn't say it out loud. Everyone in the room already knew that. The fact that reinforcements were coming all the way from the homeland was an indication of just how dangerous it was to be Britannian in the Tokyo Settlement or anywhere in Area 11 at the moment. They understood that perfectly well, yet they were all polite enough to keep the fear to themselves.

"I'm going to go check on the gym," said Milly, breaking the silence with her usual upbeat tone. "The people there are probably

already scared out of their wits and I'd hate for anything to get out of hand." Ashford Academy had been designated as a public evacuation center by the government. Students and neighboring residents gathered in the auditorium and classrooms.

"Um, I'll go with you."

"Me too?"

Shirley and Rivalz both stood to follow her. Milly halted them with a smile, her face perceptively paler than usual. She said, "This is my responsibility as president. You guys should stay here with Nunnally."

"But..." they protested.

"I have to get Nina, who's hiding in the basement too," Milly continued. "You need special Ashford ID to get into that area. So Nunnally, I'm sorry but I have to go now."

"Okay. Please be careful, Milly," they assented.

"Yeah, thank you," Milly said as she walked toward the door. But just at that moment, she heard the footsteps of several individuals outside the room. Suddenly, the door flung open and black-clad figures entered the room.

"Hands up and turn around! The Black Knights control the school!"

Standing in the middle of the room, Milly's legs trembled, her eyes wide with shock. The Black Knights had come here too? Milly was about to step away from the gun leveled at her, when someone darted between her and the gun.

"Lower your guns!"

It was Rivalz.

"Huh? That's a hell of a thing to say in this situation!" the gun-wielding man scoffed. Though his arms were spread wide and defiant in front of Milly, Rivalz's shoulders shook.

"Rivalz..." Milly said.

"Let me be cool for once!" Rivalz replied. Then to the armed intruders, "I'll protect everyone." Maybe Rivalz was acting chivalrous because he was the only man among his friends.

Maybe he was compelled by his feelings for the older girl he now protected. Whatever his motivations, his actions were of no consequence to his opponent.

"Oh, is that a fact....?" The man raised his gun to swing it at Rivalz but a voice from the hallway froze him mid-swing.

"Stop!" cried an authoritative voice. As the bearer of the voice entered the room, Rivalz did a double take. Milly and Shirley also wore looks of concern.

"I expressly told you to avoid violence," said the voice.

"Yeah, but..." whined the man as he lowered his gun. "You also told us this was gonna be our command center."

"Your command center!?" gasped the student council members at the new intruders. One wore a black mask. The other was a redhead wearing a dark visor.

Kallen Kozuki, the captain Zero's elite personal guard, surveyed the room with a grim expression. She seemed less than pleased that Ashford had been designated as the Black Knights' headquarters. After all, she was a student there. She attended under a false identity but it was her school nonetheless. The students there were her classmates, with whom she shared pleasant memories.

However, Lelouch's reasons for using Ashford as their headquarters trumped Kallen's complex feelings. He had good reason to set up his headquarters at Ashford as the Black Knights invaded the settlement. However, inflicting pain upon the student body couldn't be further from Lelouch's goal. He was doing it for the sake of a girl who attended school there, who at the moment sat calmly in a wheelchair in the center of the room.

Nunnally. Until this battle is over, you'll be protected by the Black Knights here.

"We're in no position to refuse you," said Milly.

Lelouch turned his gaze from his sister Nunnally to Milly's familiar face. Instead of the fear one might have expected, Milly's expression exuded responsibility and intelligence. Lelouch was impressed. For a person who loved to joke around and cause

trouble, her bravery and quick thinking were far superior to that of the other members of the council. It must have been her Ashford family blood. No, it was the result of her innate talent, refined and nurtured by experience. If she had been born Japanese, instead of Britannian, Lelouch would have loved for her to join the Black Knights.

"As long as you don't make any trouble, I guarantee none of you will be harmed," said Lelouch. As she listened to Lelouch's response through the voice-altering device in the mask, Milly's well-shaped eyebrow twitched. Shirley also seemed fascinated by the man in the mask.

"Like I can believe you! You guys are at war with us Britannians!" Rivalz protested. Before Lelouch had a chance to respond, Kallen stepped forward. She pressed her hand to her visor, releasing it.

"Please Rivalz, don't argue. Do as he says," The low, metered voice she spoke in matched her serious face.

"K...Kallen!?"

Instead of surprise, like Rivalz, Milly's eyes narrowed. She seemed to be trying to control herself as she said, "I see... That's what was going on..." Milly, with her privileged position as granddaughter of the school's director and daughter of the Ashford family, might have known what was going on. After all, she had access to information about Kallen's birth and upbringing. Milly looked sharply at Kallen and said, "Do I have your word that no one gets hurt? Not just us, but any of the students on the campus."

It was not a conversation between friends or fellow student council members. It was a negotiation request from the representative of the school. Kallen nodded, saying, "As long as no one tries to leave the dorms, they ought to be fine. This isn't the center of the battle."

"But if you set your command center up here, that makes us your hostages. If Britannia attacks here—" Milly countered.

"No. We don't take civilians as hostages. The Black Knights don't—"

"Sorry Kallen. I become a very difficult person in a situation like this. First of all, I'm not blaming you guys. If you don't like the word 'hostage,' I can use the word 'human shield.'"

"We aren't trying to hurt or endanger you. If you stay quiet, Britannia has no reason to attack, especially a place where a lot of children of distinguished families attend school," Kallen explained.

"Yes, including the daughter of the Stadtfeld family," snapped Milly.

"Cut the sarcasm."

"I'm just telling the truth. But, I understand. I see." Milly said quietly, seemingly placated. Kallen was relieved, but only until someone else jumped in front of the president.

"I want...I want to know what you did to me!" Shirley exclaimed dramatically. She addressed not only Kallen, but Zero.

"What...?" Kallen said.

"I was so terrified, you have no idea!" Shirley continued. "Both of you did something to me, didn't you?" For some reason, Zero's mask jerked almost imperceptibly at her statement. However, as Zero was standing behind her, Kallen missed it.

"Huh? What are you talking about?" Kallen asked.

"How could you? I don't know anything..." Shirley's outburst was interrupted by the loud footsteps of a Black Knight running into the room.

"Zero! It's the Lancelot...!" the man exclaimed.

Swishing his cape, Lelouch turned around and said, "I knew he would come..."

Kallen trailed after Lelouch as he walked toward his Nightmare, Gawain, stationed outside the school. "Zero, I'll go."

Lelouch stopped. "I want you to stay here and defend the command center with Ohgi."

"But I'm the captain of your guard. I'm supposed to be your shield..."

Kallen's deep loyalty, superb capabilities as a Knightmare pilot and the fact that she cared deeply about the ultimate fate of Ashford Academy made her the perfect subordinate to station there. However, she was having none of it. Truthfully, Lelouch knew her abilities were better used on the frontline anyway. Maybe he needed to change his strategy.

"I'm sure you know, but we don't have anyone to spare. Tohdoh and the Four Holy Swords are engaging Cornelia's troops at the government bureau. Diethard's group as well as Kaguya is directing Kyoto's forces toward their own location. If I change the plans around without a thought, we'll lose the balance of the entire battle strategy."

"I can handle him by myself. Both you and Tohdoh said facing Suzaku and that Knightmare without thinking would only increase our chance of getting attacked. But...I can handle him with my Guren this time for sure..."

"Okay," Zero acquiesced. "Proceed."

"Yes, sir!" Kallen ran to her Knightmare.

The battle was going as Lelouch had planned. After pushing back the Britannian army at the perimeter of the settlement, Tohdoh's forces had pushed back Cornelia's troops. Diethard's squad had quickly gained control over the seat of Britannia's media centers, and the Black Knights now controlled the flow of information. Lelouch and Ohgi's squad held the area around the school. After all, Nunnally's safety had to be secured. All that was left was to destroy Cornelia's troops in the remaining region, the area surrounding the government bureau. Then...they could officially declare their

independence and take control of Area 11. Everything was going well. No problems.

While Lelouch reviewed their progress and Kallen ran to her unit, his thoughts drifted to something personal, a certainty he couldn't avoid crossing on the path before him. His thoughts led to the "enemy" barreling at full speed toward him, determined to engage Zero.

...Suzaku.

Lelouch's face twisted into a strange expression under Zero's mask. It wasn't his usual egotistical grin, nor his cynical and condescending smirk. Instead, he smiled like a lion about to be thrown a steak.

Suzaku.

You and I might have been destined to be like this from the moment you chose to join the Britannian army and from when I received my geass from C.C. in Shinjuku, and began my rebellion against Britannia...

Yes. The only path left to me is forward. A warm heart lost forever...The disaster that I caused...Something irreplaceable now broken...There's more to be responsible for than I can possibly handle. But that's why I can't stop now. If I stop now, I will be defeated by the demon inside of me, the power of geass. I've never liked to lose. You're the same way, aren't you?

But Suzaku...Something's still missing. I haven't forgotten everything yet. Something evil inside me survived Euphy's death. It tries to stop me from completely becoming Zero. I still have a heart. I've been trying to let go, but I haven't been able to. What do you think I should do?

You're right. It's you.

As long as you're alive, I'll feel these doubts. As soon as I can cut that part of me away, I'll be free.

Lancelot sliced a Black Knights' Burai in two with his sword. Another nearby Burai levied his assault rifle. But by the time he'd raised his weapon, the white Knightmare had disappeared from sight. The red wings on its back were a float unit that enabled the white Knightmare to leap into the sky. He zig zagged down again, slicing the Burai's cockpit up as his machine thundered against the earth again.

"Where's Zero!? Where is he!?" Suzaku screamed.

Unlike the battle at Kyushu, where Lancelot had taken on an entire army by itself, the white Knightmare's current attacks weren't even strategically suicidal. Suzaku's charge resembled the wild rampage of an angry tiger and it had nothing to do with strategy. Furthermore, Suzaku was attacking with far greater ferocity than normal. It would be misleading to say that he usually went easy on his opponents, but at the very least, in the past he'd mainly focused on destroying his enemy's mobility. But in this fight, Suzaku showed none of that calculated mercy—instead he ripped his sword with abandon through metal as if seeking blood. His furious fangs and claws gouged a blood penance out of his enemies in a deadly and unstoppable dance.

"Zero, I'm going to kill you!!" His roar echoed across the battlefield.



It was a small boy who had told Suzaku the truth. Inside the Avalon, Suzaku had been sitting listlessly next to the capsule containing Euphemia's body when a strange boy suddenly introduced himself.

"How do you do, Suzaku Kururugi?"

The boy said his name was V.V. He looked no more than ten years old, but wore long blond hair and voluminous ceremonial robes that would not have looked out of place on a cult leader. Beyond the shock of the child's appearance, Suzaku was surprised

to see anyone there at all. The boy asked Suzaku if he'd like to know what had happened, then proceeded to tell him.

"Zero possesses a supernatural power. What you saw at the ceremony was an example of that power."

Supernatural...?

"Impossible...How could that be?"

The boy just laughed at Suzaku's incredulity. "You shouldn't lie, Suzaku Kururugi. I know you've been thinking something was off about everything. You've been mystified by it, haven't you? How do you explain Princess Euphemia's sudden and drastic change? See? Let's go back further. What about you, who always follows the rules? How do you account for your actions on Shikine Island?"

"W...Who are you...?"

"And at each incident, who was there with you?" the boy prodded.

"...Agh!" A drop of sweat ran down Suzaku's face. "B... But still...that can't be..."

"Oh boy, and here I thought you'd be good at listening to people!" The boy shrugged his shoulders and grinned. Although his voice was high-pitched and his tone childlike, there was something strange about the boy. Something otherworldly.

"You've seen enough examples by now," the boy continued. "Perhaps, besides Zero himself, you're the one who's been closest to these events. The Shinjuku Incident...the Orange Incident...the Lake Kawaguchi Incident...Narita...Wouldn't you agree that at each of these incidents, something extraordinary occurred?"

"...."

"In each incident, someone behaved unexpectedly, as if they were guided by someone else entirely. And whoever behaved in that manner had at some point recently been with Zero. Right there, that's the secret to his 'miracles.'"

Wait. Wait a minute, then...

"...You said what Zero has been doing...what he did to Euphy..."

The boy laughed again, in his childish and strange way.



"It's the power to control others as you wish, and then erase their memories afterward." The boy smiled. "Geass. That's what Zero called it. How unfortunate the way things have gone because of that power. I'm sure what's going on now is what Zero wanted though. Princess Euphemia had the best interests of the Japanese people at heart. But that wasn't okay with Zero. He wanted the position of Japan's messiah himself; he didn't want to share it or give it away to anyone. That must be why he did what he did."

He killed Euphy...for such a petty reason...He killed Euphy because of that? Euphy!? She had accepted Zero and was trying to get others to approve of him! What a horrible turn of events!

"Noooooooo....!"

Lancelot pierced a stationary armored vehicle with its MVS sword. Before its fuel exploded, the Knightmare had already zoomed down the cracked asphalt road, leaving the shell of the smoldering vehicle behind. Inside the cockpit, a knight's heart burned with blue flame.

A tonfa swirled from above toward Lancelot. Suzaku angrily knocked it aside with a swing of his blade. The tonfa spun back up to the top of a nearby building, where its owner waited in a red Knightmare.

"Suzaku!" she yelled through her external speaker.

"Kallen!?" he replied.

"We meet in battle once again," she said levelly. "I'm sorry but this time you're going to die!"

Suzaku ground his teeth, then shouted, "You're all fools! You and the Japanese—he's lying to all of you!" Kallen scowled in the cockpit of her Guren Mk-II. She could care less what the

cowardly lapdog of Massacre Princess Euphemia had to say. She replied fiercely.

"I won't put up with that ignorant drive! What do you even know about Zero anyway!?"

"Then tell me what you know about him!" Suzaku shouted. Lancelot disappeared for a second then reappeared right in front of Kallen. Stunned, it took Kallen a moment to respond. This wasn't the dancelike grace she was accustomed to fighting, but the piloting of a madman lashing out with his strength.

"TELL ME WHERE ZERO IS NOW!!!"

It was impossible for Suzaku to even try to hold a conversation. Lancelot crashed into the Guren as if trying to slam her into the building. Kallen blocked his charge with her radiant wave. The force of their clash propelled the Guren back against a building. Kallen rebounded then fell. Though his attack had failed, Suzaku leaped into the sky with his float unit to stare down the falling red Nightmare. He wasn't about to let her get away.

"Now answer me! Where's Zero?" he demanded.

"Like I'd tell that to a filthy traitor like you!" Kallen replied hotly.

"Then let's finish this here!"

"Don't think you have an edge because you can fly!"

The radiant wave claw and Lancelot's MVS were about to clash again. Kallen feinted then kicked off the wall of the building again. The Guren disappeared from Lancelot's sight. By the time Lancelot landed on the ground, the Guren reappeared, charging at Suzaku. He couldn't avoid her. Suzaku swung his sword arm to the side. The Guren avoided his attack by ducking low and grabbed Lancelot's left arm. With glee, she said, "Now I got you!" Smashing down on the controls, she screamed, "TAKE THIS!!!"

Radiant wave energy coursed over Lancelot's left arm. The metal melted and was about to explode. But right before the distortion could spread from arm to shoulder, Suzaku forcefully ejected the offending arm. The ejected arm blew the Guren back

with it. Lancelot didn't waste the opportunity. He shot his Variable Ammunition Repulsion Impact Spitfire, VARIS, at point blank range. Kallen tried to block it with repeated pulses from the radiant wave surger, but she couldn't recharge her energy fast enough. Her right arm, the Guren's strongest weapon, was lost.

The explosion had also caused the Guren to lose its balance. Before she could regain it, Lancelot had flown into the sky, out of the Guren's close-range attack radius. Thanks to the float unit, Suzaku remained mid-air as he aimed his VARIS at the Guren below.

"Tell me! Where is Zero?" Suzaku yelled once again.

"You know, I really hate pushy guys," Kallen said in a measured tone.

"Okay. Then die here..." Suzaku said, completely serious. His VARIS was pointed right at her. Kallen knew from the position he was at, and with her radiant wave surger and right arm being gone, she would be unable to deflect the shots. "Ugh..." Kallen groaned in Guren's cockpit.

"Any last words?" Suzaku said calmly, though his violent intent was just as clear.

"Wait," cried another voice.

"What!?" both Kallen and Suzaku exclaimed. They turned to see Gawain join Lancelot in the sky. Before Kallen could beg to know why, Zero continued speaking. "Suzaku Kururugi, my belief that you and I could be allies was incorrect. I'm no longer gullible about our would-be partnership. Let's resolve this one-on-one."

Suzaku's eyes smoldered. "I'd love to."

Apart from the one-on-one battle, the overall fight was actually grinding to a standstill.

After entering into the settlement, the Black Knights had divided into several squads. Tohdoh's squad was tasked with

capturing the government bureau, Diethard's squad aimed at oppressing the media center, and Ohgi's squad's target was the school and its vicinity. They'd attacked the Britannian army from three different directions. Of the three, Diethard's and Ohgi's squads had already conquered most of their strategic targets. The Black Knights held almost the entire western portion of the settlement. However, they hadn't yet been able to occupy their primary target—the government bureau. Although Tohdoh's troops were the best the Black Knights had to offer, the government bureau was essentially a fortress. As the nerve center of Area 11, it had to be. Even Tohdoh stood no chance of success against the Glaston Knights Cornelia deployed there. After two failed attacks that had cost time and many lives, Tohdoh called for a retreat.

4:25AM

Per Zero's instructions from Gawain, Diethard and Ohgi sent reinforcements to Tohdoh. When supplies arrived from Kyoto, where insurgents had secured Britannian military stockpiles, Tohdoh immediately renewed his attack on the government bureau. Apart from that being his duty, Tohdoh knew from experience the importance of capturing the government bureau that day. As things were, Cornelia didn't need to single-handedly destroy the Black Knights on her doorstep. Britannia's Pacific Naval Fleet, commanded by Chancellor Schneizel, was already en route to Area 11. Cornelia just needed to drag the battle out until those powerful reinforcements arrived and could bombard the rebels from sky, sea, and ground. Lelouch and Tohdoh feared that endgame.

Although they had popular support, the Black Knights were at their heart a guerilla organization who didn't stand a chance should Britannia's reinforcements arrive. At the very least, the Black Knights needed to control key areas across Area 11 and then defend those targets from the Britannian military. Capture of the government bureau, the symbol of Britannian control in Area 11, was absolutely essential to that strategy. If they destroyed

it, or at least got Cornelia on the run, not only battles in the Tokyo Settlement, but all across Japan would go more favorably. Conversely, failure to take the government bureau meant certain failure. Both Lelouch and Tohdoh knew that well.

As for the Britannians, they only needed to continue defending themselves. Such was the nature of the rebellion. So, sensibly, the Britannians used their troops mainly in defensive capacities. Lord Guilford, the knight entrusted with defending the government bureau, unleashed his own wartime experience to comply with Viceroy Cornelia's strategy. Tohdoh, who excelled at commanding flexible strategies, found himself struggling to successfully execute his battle within the given time frame.



"I wonder if Nina's still in the Ganymede hangar...?" Milly wondered. She herself was locked in the student council room.

"And Kallen's a part of this whole thing" Rivalz shook his head. "This sucks, what are we gonna do?"

"...It's all right," Shirley responded calmly. She leaned on the table and stared off into space intently. "The Black Knights—or Zero, rather—won't do anything to harm us."

"How can you be so sure of that?"

"....."

Shirley didn't answer Rivalz's question, or even look at him for that matter. That caught Milly's attention.

...She must have some reason for saying that.

However, as always, Shirley wouldn't say anything she didn't want to, even if asked directly. Milly accepted that, thinking that Shirley at least wasn't lying to them. In fact, Milly also had a sneaking suspicion that the Black Knights wouldn't harm them, if their actions earlier, including Zero's attitude, were representative. And Kallen was with him too.

Milly was already thinking ahead to what dangers lay beyond the Black Knights themselves. And one thing stuck in her mind was the Britannian army. While Kallen has asserted that the Britannian army wouldn't dare attack a school where their own children attended, Milly wasn't so sure. Although she felt the assumption to be generally correct, she didn't trust the army either.

She wondered if Kallen didn't know. Apparently she didn't. Although she was the daughter of the prestigious Stadtfeld family, Kallen had been born to a Japanese mother. She was born and raised in Japan. Milly heard that Kallen had been adopted by the Stadtfeld family only a few years ago. In addition, as a member of the Black Knights, she must have had many experiences where she observed Britannia from the outside, but not from inside. But Milly was different. As a full-fledged Britannian and daughter of the prestigious Ashford family, she'd been observing the nation her whole life, both subjectively and objectively.

It was as Zero always said. Britannia was a nation in which the strong oppressed the weak. That was Britannia's biggest and most unforgivable fault.

Personally, Milly wasn't completely opposed to Zero's sentiments. She herself had witness the racism of the Ashford students when Suzaku had transferred in. With the help of Lelouch, Nunnally, and the other council members, she'd reversed the ostracism against the Japanese student. No matter how many achievements he'd earned in the army or how good he was as a Knightmare pilot, the students viewed him as one of the "weak." It had been a tiny demonstration of the "strong" Britannian students oppressing a "weak" Japanese person, and had taken the combined weight of the even "stronger" student council to overthrow that prejudice. Despite her good deeds, Milly knew she was just as biased at heart.

The Britannian Empire was built on the strong oppressing the weak. From a humanitarian viewpoint, Britannia's attitude was completely evil. However, in reality, that evil became their strength.

How did the Britannian army win so many wars? In addition to their massive power and superb weapons technology, Britannia's persistent stance of dehumanizing the conquered gave them additional strength. For example, a commander might formulate a strategy in which he used his subordinate as a decoy. If this was done by a democratic nation like the EU, that commander would be criticized if the decoy's troops were decimated, even if they won the battle. Not so in Britannia. *Perhaps*, Britannians would say, *the decoys died because they were weak. The commander did a good job. Wouldn't it have been worse if the enemy had taken the decoys as hostages?* Except extenuating circumstances, the majority of Britannian commanders didn't hesitate to make a general attack order, no matter who would suffer from it. As long as their actions gained praise rather than criticism, they were satisfied. That was Britannia.

Milly feared her own country. Carefree days spent at school lulled her into forgetting that her own nation neglected to treat people as people. In an emergency, it all came flooding back.

It was meaningless to talk about hostages or human shields as far as the Britannian army was concerned. Milly was all too aware of the fact. The moment the Black Knights captured them, they became "the weak to be cut off" in Britannia's eyes. Their citizenship and status didn't matter. If the school was the Black Knights' command center, the Britannian army would attack without hesitation. This was especially true of Viceroy Cornelia, who was never known to back down in military affairs. Furthermore, Cornelia had just lost her sister, Princess Euphemia, during a ceremony that honored Elevens. She would be feeling bitter hatred towards Zero, the leader of the Black Knights. If she found his location, Cornelia would probably raze the school with Milly and all the others still inside it. Under current conditions, she was more scared of Cornelia's forces than the Black Knights.

...I've got to find a way out of this situation.

Milly had been lost in thought for a while. Because she was locked up and had nothing better to do than sit in a chair, arms

crossed, and think, she had no idea how the battle outside was going. However, it seemed no matter who claimed victory—the Black Knights or the Britannian Forces—nothing good would happen to the students at Ashford.

But what do to?

Milly bit her lip and grew frustrated again. Then suddenly...

"Coward!!"

An angry voice rang out from the school lawn, piercing the tightly closed windows. Nunnally, near Milly, looked up. With her keen sense of hearing, she must have known who the person was as soon as she heard the voice. It didn't take Milly and Rivalz long to realize either.

Two monstrous figures filled the window. One belonged to the white Knightmare, Lancelot, while the other was a black Knightmare barely visible in the dark night sky. The voice from the Lancelot continued.

"You've taken them as your hostages? Some one-on-one fight this is!"

As the black Knightmare approached the ground, someone inside responded coldly, "You brought this on yourself when you rejected my offers to join me as my ally. Now you'll regret these foolish moral standards that you cling to!"

"Hey, isn't that the black Knightmare that's been all over the news recently?" Rivalz gawked.

"No way..." answered Shirley in disbelief. "Zero's not targeting this building, is he? He can't be! He can't! Because if he does..." Shirley caught Rivalz eyes and glanced over at Nunnally, who seemed quite concerned.

Of course, Zero, or rather, Lelouch, had no intention of harming the school. It contained his reason for living. Only because he had

absolute confidence in winning this fight did he bring Suzaku there. Plus, enraged though he was, Suzaku would never harm the school.

Fool...Lelouch laughed. Foolish moral standards, indeed. Suzaku, can't you give those up yet? That's why you're weak. You can't even protect what's most important to you. You only need one thing that's truly important. Unless you discard everything else, you can't protect the one thing that matters to you. I threw everything away a long time ago. I scaled the wall you can't climb over. My hands have been stained with blood for a long time.

"Zeroooooo!" screeched Suzaku. Lancelot charged on foot toward Gawain. It had the VARIS in its hand, but at that range, Suzaku wouldn't use it for fear of damaging the school. He'd just get in close and slice Gawain to pieces with his sword or drown him in a hail of fire from the slash harkens. His attack plan was too basic to even be called a strategy.

"Now!" barked C.C. from the pilot seat of Gawain. Lancelot's mad charge was suddenly interrupted by the encirclement of a field. Glinting metal pods buried in the ground around him generated a field around Lancelot.

"Ngh! What the!?" Suzaku growled. He'd been snared by the Gefjun Disturber. It was the same device that had captured Lancelot once before back on Shikine Island.

"Ha ha!" giggled Rakshata Chawla, head of the Black Knights' research and development. "I anticipated they wouldn't have adequate time to come up with a countermeasure for this." She stood nearby, watching the proceedings. "Remember your promise Zero."

"Yes," Lelouch responded without hesitation. "You may do with the machine as you wish." As Lelouch took off in Gawain, Suzaku's enraged scream filled the air.

"Zero!" yelled an enraged Suzaku. "You deceive the people who trust you till the very end! You betrayer!"

"Hmph," Lelouch snorted. "I've no time to argue which of us is the bigger hypocrite. Farewell, Suzaku Kururugi." The Gawain

zoomed away. In Lancelot's cockpit, Suzaku slammed his clenched fists onto the control panel.

"DAMN YOU!"

Neither Suzaku nor Lelouch's eyes held the same friendly warmth for each other that they used to. One person, one girl who cared deeply for them both, wished with all her heart that things could be different. She asked herself, *can't they be stopped? Instead of fighting, they should be cooperating to walk the same path.*

3

Britannia's floating air ship, the Avalon, glided above the clouds.

"Ngh..." sighed Major Lloyd Asplund, head of ASEEC. He sat outside the ship's changing room and applied a pad to his red and swollen cheek. How embarrassing, to be punched by his own subordinate!

Someone else occupied the changing room. Her voice could be heard amongst a rustling of clothes. "Why did you try to stop Suzaku?" Cecile asked.

A good question.

With Euphemia's body still aboard the Avalon, Suzaku had suited up, intending to take Lancelot into battle. Lloyd tried to stop him, explaining that Cornelia hadn't ordered their unit into battle. Furthermore, Lancelot was not Suzaku's personal property, but belonged to the military. As such, Suzaku wasn't allowed to pilot it or join any battles unless ordered. For his troubles, Lloyd was rewarded with a punch in the face. Then Suzaku had forcefully yanked Lancelot's key from Lloyd's hand.

"It was my duty as a military contractor," Lloyd answered with little conviction. Putting an arm through her uniform, Cecile paused, then sighed. "You didn't want him killed, did you?"

She didn't mean that the current situation in Tokyo Settlement was too dangerous. Considering the Lancelot and Suzaku's battle

history, he'd already taken assignments much more dangerous than the current battle in the settlement—Kyushu, for example. The issue at hand wasn't the risk all soldiers faced upon entering a battlefield. The most dangerous thing in this situation was Suzaku himself. He was in a mindset where he wouldn't back down no matter what, not even should he be shot.

"Please, you know me better than that," Lloyd muttered.

"....."

"The biggest human flaw is that we're so pitifully fragile in our bodies, our hearts, and our relationships with each other," he answered.

"Nevertheless..." Cecile exited the changing room upon zipping up her uniform. It wasn't her usual military issue uniform; rather, it was the form fitting suit worn only by Knightmare pilots. "You can't bend the world or people any which way you want."

"I want every part in my mechanisms to function exactly as I wish. If we lose Kururugi, we'll just need to find another Devicer."

Despite what he may have said, the Avalon continued its advancement on the Tokyo Settlement where the fierce battle raged.



The sky lightened with dawn's approach.

The battle for the government bureau went back and forth. Whenever the frontline troops led by Tohdoh approached the Knightmares at the outer defenses, Guilford's defensive forces and the government bureau's battery cannons shot at them all at once. The initial energy of the Black Knights' surge began to recede as the battle began to look like one of attrition. Because they only needed to defend their territory, the Britannian army was gaining the upper hand. Lelouch, watching the battle on Gawain's monitors, laughed confidently.

"Their defenses are strong, as expected," he observed.

"Should you really be treating this so casually?" C.C. admonished. "Enemy reinforcements are arriving."

Just as she said this, lights from the enemy's bomber jets were approaching from the northwest. These weren't reinforcements from the homeland, but additional troops called in from another base in Area 11. There weren't a lot of them, but enough to threaten the Black Knights. One of the Black Knights' weaknesses was their lack of aerial power. They'd gained anti-air weapons from the Britannian facilities they captured, but once the enemy gained control of the skies, the battle would become strategically disadvantageous for the rebel. Still, they had Gawain and its Hadron Cannon.

"We have a replenished energy filler, haven't we?" Lelouch smirked. Flashing his usual confident smile, he grabbed the trigger for the Hadron Cannon. C.C. shrugged her shoulders a little bit, engaged stealth mode and rose to a point high in the air. Lelouch engaged the Hadron Cannon.

Bomber jets were not made for fighting and, as such, are not very maneuverable. Against a high-speed unit like Lancelot, they stood no chance. The same was true against the Hadron Cannon. In just seconds, Gawain had decimated almost all the aerial reinforcements. After confirming the success of the cannon, Lelouch opened a channel to Tohdoh.

"Tohdoh, I'm going to move in on the government bureau from above."

"Huh?" Tohdoh grunted with a hint of disagreement. "Isn't it risky to rely on the abilities of that machine?"

"I know that. I'm just going to create some confusion," Lelouch said as Gawain entered the airspace above the government bureau. As the bureau was a fortress, he expected some fire from its anti-aircraft cannons. For some reason, he didn't receive any.

C.C. cocked her head. "What's going on? Even in stealth mode, we're close enough that they should be able to see our

shadow. Did they not staff the roof under the assumption that we don't have any aerial power?"

"If so, they made a huge blunder," Lelouch answered. "Well, so be it. We've been given the chance to attack as we please." Although the pair were a bit giddy at their luck, they were flying into a trap. Gawain touched down on the roof of the bureau. It was an empty paradise. Not metaphorically speaking, it was an actual paradise of flowers, water fountains, singing birds, Greek columns and manicured grass. The smile vanished from Lelouch's face.

"This reminds me of..." he began. The scenery somehow overlapped with a long-interred memory. The garden looked like something Lelouch had known long before he ever came to Area 11, to Japan. But that was supposed to be a memory, and a memory alone.

"Yes. Aries Villa," C.C. said below him.

"How do you know that!?" Lelouch exclaimed suspiciously.

"I'll tell you someday, when the time is right," she answered, not turning around or betraying a modicum of emotion. A bit pissed, Lelouch wanted to interrogate her further, but that train of thought was interrupted by a sudden syrupy genteel greeting.

"Welcome, Zero."

"I!"

"I figured you'd show up here as soon as you heard about the air raid. So that's the only trick up your sleeve after all. I expected as much." The voice came from a Gloucester at the far end of the garden. It was no ordinary Gloucester, but the specially designed Nightmare of Cornelia, viceroy of Area 11. Its cape flapped in the wind.

"Now...join us for your welcome soirée," she spat, her voice fierce. "Care for a dance?"

Please. Please understand, Big Sister...

Those were her little sister's last words to her. They were from a conversation they'd had the night after Euphemia declared the establishment of the Specially Administrated Zone of Japan.

After that conversation, Cornelia successfully avoided seeing her sister. Even when her sister requested a meeting, she used work as an excuse to decline the request. She had Darlton deal with the issue of the Specially Administrated Zone. The time had been hectic for Euphemia and she'd wanted to talk to her older sister. But Cornelia repeatedly rejected her requests.

That's how it became their last conversation.

Her little sister had sincerely pleaded with her to understand. Cornelia didn't even consider budging, and coldly dismissed her. That was how their time together ended. Although they were in a period of disagreement, Cornelia was Euphemia's beloved big sister and Euphemia was Cornelia's darling little sister...

Cornelia had been petrified with guilt and regret until she saw the Black Knights. Suddenly her senses flooded back to her. Cornelia was unable to process what Euphemia did at the ceremony for the Specially Administrated Zone. She didn't believe her sister capable of such an act. In Cornelia's mind, Euphemia was the victim of an enemy scheme. She accepted no other explanation. That faith was absolute.

Before dying, what was Euphemia trying to do? It seemed she was trying to pardon one man's crime. She was willing to exchange everything she had, even her status as a princess, just for one man. In return, what did that man repay her with? What did that man do to her beloved Euphy?

Death is not enough but it's the best I can offer. So I shall give him death.

Zero. That shameless masked man. He understands nothing of the Empire's ideals, nor of my sister's merciful love. He's an outcast who only brings bloodshed and chaos. He's a pitiless devil. That man is my sister Euphemia's...

"...MURDERER!!!"

Gawain failed to fend off the Gloucester's Shot Lancer as it charged at him. The spear glanced off the right side of the armor.

"Dammit!" Lelouch swore. C.C. twisted the control stick. Gawain shifted and shot its slash harkens. By then, Cornelia's Gloucester wasn't in front of Gawain any longer. She slammed the legs of Gawain from the side with her Shot Lancer.

"Ha ha ha ha! What's wrong Zero?!" Cornelia shouted with glee. It was a somewhat twisted joy, as if the hole opened by her recent loss was forcing out any and all emotions she had left. The person in the cockpit was no longer recognizable as Viceroy Cornelia, the cold and calculating military expert. The Cornelia that had knowingly left an open space in the sky above the government bureau to lure Zero in. It was clearly beyond common sense to wait for him alone. If she wanted to capture him or something of the sort, she should have stationed enough units there to ensure that outcome. So far gone was her mental state, she was absolutely consumed with killing Zero herself. From the moment she heard the report of Euphemia's death from ASEEC, something broke inside her.

Even so, the situation did not necessarily favor Lelouch and C.C. Upon impact from the Shot Lancer, Gawain's body swayed. C.C. shot another ineffective round from the slash harkens. The Gloucester circled around and opened fire on Gawain with its assault rifle. The shots hit a thicker part of the armor and bounced back, but as a result, Gawain's left knee and right shoulder now malfunctioned. Lelouch paled as he operated the control panel, supplying energy to the damaged parts.

"Argh! The specs on this thing are far superior to hers!" he yelled.

If Lelouch had analyzed what he'd just said, he might have found the root of the problem. The problem wasn't the specifications, but the unit itself. A large unit like the Gawain wasn't built for or suited to close-quarters combat. Its size severely damaged its maneuverability. Gawain's strength rested in its superb information analysis capabilities and in mid-to long range

battles where it could release the fearsome power of the Hadron Cannon.

That said, no ordinary opponent would easily overpower Gawain. Unfortunately for Lelouch, his current enemy's abilities far exceeded that of a regular soldier's. Cornelia, one of the best Knightmare pilots in Britannia, had trained to emulate her hero, Marianne the Flash, on the Gloucester, which was a high-performance unit. Among the Black Knights, only Kallen with her Guren Mk-II or Tohdoh with his Gekka could hope to best her in a one-on-one battle. The highly mobile Gloucester was never going to give Gawain a chance to fire the Hadron Cannon.

After realizing that, C.C. used her pilot's controls to retreat to the sky. If distance was the issue, then they would create distance and attack from above. Unfortunately, that turned out to be a costly mistake. Gawain's float unit didn't move at high speed like Lancelot's. A normal human couldn't bear the force that Suzaku seemed able to. Therefore, Gawain's take off was designed to be a gentle lift.

"Weakling!" Cornelia shouted. Her unit released a slash harken in hook mode. It wrapped around Gawain's shoulders. She retracted the harken and jumped at the same time, which propelled her comparatively small suit toward the larger one. "I have you right where I want you! Your life is now in my hands!" Gawain lost its balance in the air as the Gloucester jumped on its chest.

"Cornelia!" snarled Lelouch.

"This is your judgment!!" Cornelia exclaimed triumphantly, as she aimed her assault rifle straight at Gawain.

But...

Suddenly, the tables turned.

She was close enough to shoot. But for the grief-stricken Cornelia, no distance would be close enough. However, for

some reason, she didn't fire her assault rifle. Before she could, the spearpoint of a Shot Lancer pierced through the cockpit of Cornelia's Gloucester. The weapon belonged not to Gawain, but to another Gloucester below her. It pierced a hole in Cornelia's unit. Although it didn't hit the seat of the cockpit, it dealt a fatal blow to the operations of her unit. Pieces of material flew like shrapnel, embedding themselves into the princess' body.

The rear view monitor displayed a Gloucester that had a different chassis from Cornelia's, but was undoubtedly Britannian. A man's voice came from the communication panel.

"Princess, it's me. Darlton."

Cornelia, her back already arched from the impact, now stiffened with shock at hearing the familiar voice.

"Wha...But why, Darlton, why...?" she gasped.

"Don't be afraid, I haven't come to kill you, my lady," he said.

Lelouch smirked. "Just in time."

"I'm here to deliver you to Zero, Your Highness..." In the cockpit of the interloping Gloucester, Andreas Darlton's eyes flashed red. If his flat, emotionless voice hadn't been enough of a giveaway, his red-rimmed pupils were a sure sign of the power that possessed him. He was under the sway of geass, from a command Lelouch had given him at the ceremony earlier.

Mid sentence, Cornelia's Gloucester lost balance. She descended from Gawain toward the roof. The moment Darlton saw that on his monitor, the light caging his eyes disappeared. His order had been to capture Cornelia and deliver her to Zero. That command being accomplished, he came to his senses.

"Ggh!" After normal color returned to his eyes, Darlton froze. "What have I done? Why, princess!?"

Cornelia's Gloucester crashed onto the roof beside him generating a cloud of debris. Darlton found he couldn't move. His belly was stained in blood from where Euphemia shot him at the ceremony. Lelouch's frosty voice descended upon Darlton.

"Thank you Darlton," Lelouch said, as he released Gawain's Hadron Cannons on Darlton's Gloucester.

"Princess...!" Darlton cried.

Andreas Darlton, the military chief of staff of Area 11 and longtime servant of two princesses, was shot by the younger sister, impaled the older sister, and incinerated in a blaze of light and heat.

4

Whipping flames cast the scene in a red light.

The garden had been completely wrecked in the battle. The remains of Cornelia's Gloucester perched haphazardly on the remains of a broken fountain. The bloodied princess leaned against a fallen concrete block breathing heavily. Perhaps it was due to her injuries, but the mad rage was gone from her eyes and she seemed both calm and sane again.

Zero didn't have his mask on though he hid his left eye with one hand. His black cape fluttered in the wind as Cornelia looked up at him.

"...I see... You were Zero... this whole time..." she wheezed. Everything made sense to her now. Zero's excessive hatred for Britannia... The gap between his stated ideals and his brutal tactics... And Euphemia had still tried to save him, knowing all this? She had been willing to use her special privilege as royalty to absolve the man in front of her of his sins. He'd renounced his own royal privileges already so he couldn't use that privilege himself. It crossed Cornelia's mind that if Lelouch was still alive, then his sister Nunnally had to be alive as well.

"You did this... for Nunnally?" she asked.

"Correct," Lelouch responded quietly, his hand still over his left eye. "I will demolish the present world and build a new and better one in its place."

"You killed them all for the sake of that madness? Clovis? Even Euphy!?"

"You're one to talk, my dear sister," Lelouch's uncovered right eye glinted. "Considering how you idolized my mother, Marianne the Flash. But in the end, you didn't do anything to help her. Nothing. And so my mother ended up like she did. Nunnally ended up like she did." His dispassionate gaze contradicted the fact that they were siblings.

Cornelia slumped. "It would seem... talking with you further... would prove utterly pointless." She didn't feel like recovering the fond memories or lost years, not with Euphemia being gone forever.

"Indeed," Lelouch nodded solemnly. "Well then..." Lelouch finally removed his hand from his left eye. The geass sigil flashed; an order was being made.

"Lelouch vi Britannia orders you to answer him."

The truth of what happened seven years ago was about to be revealed.



A group of Black Knights surrounded the white Knightmare frozen in the Gefjun Disturber field.

They were preparing a supersized welding torch to break open the cockpit. As soon as Suzaku noticed that in the monitor, he let out a sound of frustration. Since Lancelot's armor was made from a special alloy, it wouldn't cave to the torch easily. However, since Suzaku wasn't in a position to get up and go anytime soon, they'd break it open sooner or later.

He had to do something.

Suzaku wasn't the only one witnessing the display.

"Oh, no. If we can't do anything, they'll get Suzaku, too..."

Rivalz groaned. His expression, reflected in the window, displayed

genuine concern for his friend, though he also seemed afraid to lose their only reliable ally. Unlike Rivalz, student council president Milly calmly stood at the entrance of the locked student council room, her ear to the door.

"Something's up. It was loud before but it's too quiet now."

After shaking her head in bemusement, Milly signaled Nunnally to come over. Nunnally wheeled over and Milly helped her place her ear against the door as well. The blind girl gave a little nod and said, "The hallway on this floor is very quiet. The guards seem to have evacuated their posts in front of our door. What's going on?"

Then, Shirley, looking out the window opposite Rivalz added, "I see a lot of people by the school building. They're looking for something."

"Looking for something? I wonder if someone escaped."

Whatever's going on, it means... Milly thought. Before she could finish her thought, Nunnally said, "Please go."

"Wha?" the president blurted.

"Please help Suzaku Milly. That's what you've been thinking, isn't it?" Nunnally's pretty face displayed uncharacteristic firmness. "You said Suzaku's Nightmare stopped operating because of some mechanical problem, didn't you? If that's the problem and it can be repaired, then Suzaku can, you know..."

Milly gaped. *Sometimes that girl can surprise you.* Before replying, Milly sighed, grinned and reminded herself that Nunnally had seen right through her. Nunnally was more keen than she thought. Well, about as keen as Milly herself, at least. *P e r h a p s* Nunnally, like Milly, didn't trust the Britannian army. Considering her background, it made sense. But it was more likely that...

"Suzaku's the best hope we have," stated Nunnally.

So she knew. They couldn't rely on the Britannian Forces. But unlike the regular soldiers, Suzaku and his white Nightmare wouldn't hurt anyone at school. He wouldn't fight like that, which actually had gotten him in trouble in the first place.

Honestly, Milly knew it was a losing bet. Escaping from an unguarded room wouldn't prove too difficult even though the door was still locked. Figuring out an escape route wasn't really an issue either. The school might have been in the Black Knights' possession but it was the student's home turf. After escaping, they faced the real problems. The hallway outside the room might be abandoned but the area around Suzaku was teeming with Black Knights. Furthermore, even if they could approach the big square box connected to the strange glowing pods that seemed to be interfering with Suzaku, what would they do next?

Nunnally seemed to believe there was something they could do, but the student council members lacked both the know-how and tools to accomplish anything meaningful. If it was only a matter of disrupting the device, there might a cable they could cut. But she couldn't be sure of that. And even if they did successfully turn off the device, would Suzaku's Nightmare start operating? Judging by the fact that the pods hadn't stopped glowing since ensnaring Suzaku, that seemed a safe assumption.

Despite her many doubts, Milly wasn't afraid. Sitting around wouldn't help anything either. They were facing death whether they took a chance or not. Failure just meant their deaths came sooner rather than later. And it would be worse to die knowing that they had a chance to do something and didn't take it. Although Milly could rationally contemplate her demise, she was still Britannian at the core. Britannia discards the weak. Knowing this, a Britannian will do anything to prevent themselves from becoming the weak; they fight back. In her own way, Milly was fighting back. And in his own way, so too was a prince who had been discarded by his nation...

Nunnally patiently waited for Milly's response. After a nod, Milly looked up to investigate how the other two felt. She didn't want to involve them in her risky plan and wanted to let them know that, but they were no longer standing by

the windows. Her determined classmates were already standing by the door with her.

"Wait you guys..." gasped Milly.

"I told you I wanted to look cool for once," said Rivalz.

"I'm sorry Nunnally." Milly turned to the younger girl. "We're going to have to leave you alone for a little while."

"I'll be fine. I'm sorry, if I wasn't like this..." By the time Milly returned her attention to her other charges, Shirley and Rivalz had already formulated a plan. Milly scratched her head sheepishly and smiled at them.

No one person can restrain all the chaos of an uprising. Not even Zero, the leader of the Black Knights, who was supposed to be able to grasp the whole situation better than anyone else, knew about everything that was going on. Even while Lelouch was about to finish with Cornelia, on the roof of the government bureau, so close to winning the day, several seemingly insignificant events began to turn the tide against his victory. Lelouch had nearly forgotten to account for the actions of Milly and the Ashford student council for instance. And what Lelouch didn't know, he couldn't plan around. His calculations just didn't account for the small incidents he didn't know about. For this, it would be harsh to criticize Lelouch. He wasn't an almighty God, but just a human with an above average ability to predict human behavior. However, Lelouch was not yet aware that humans didn't always act like chess pieces.

As it turned out, the group of Black Knights who initially had been the most successful pursuing their strategy were the first to suffer fallout. Disaster struck the heart of the command center.

"Ohgi's been shot?" exclaimed Minami, a ranking Black Knight who wore glasses. He paled. "Who shot him? Was it that woman we took hostage?"

"Yes," responded Minami's subordinate, a man who bore an equally frightened face. "I heard she was a collaborator who reported directly to the deputy commander. He was listening to her story in another room when she shot him."

"What happened to the woman?"

"She ran away. We're searching for her but..."

Minami didn't need further elaboration to understand. Ashford Academy was likely the largest school in Area 11. Besides the sheer vastness of the property, it also contained a forest and dozens of school buildings. Not to mention that a number of the Black Knights there had been sent to join Tohdoh's forces on the frontline. The command center was understaffed. Both the Britannians and rebels were fighting to the last man.

The last thing they needed was deputy commander Ohgi's incapacitation.

"Okay. I'll send my group for the search," Minami said. His subordinate brightened at the news.

"That'll help us."

"But don't let the other groups know about this. We have to avoid confusion. I'll contact Zero...Honestly, I don't know where he is and can't locate him. So it may take some time."

"Y...Yes, sir."

After dismissing his subordinate, Minami yanked out his mobile communicator.

The student council room was quiet without Milly and the others.

Nunnally Lamperouge sat alone silently. On her lap sat a worn cream-colored notebook. It wasn't Nunnally's but Milly's. Milly had entrusted the notebook to Nunnally when she left the room.

"...This is something important," Milly said as she handed the notebook over to Nunnally. "Can you do me a favor? I want you to hold onto this for me."

Of course, Nunnally had no idea that Milly valued not the notebook itself, but what was hidden inside. It was a picture of everyone on the student council...!

"Oh, but Milly..."

"Ha ha. Don't worry," Milly smiled at Nunnally, who seemed surprised to be entrusted with anything. "I didn't mean it like that. This is like a spell."

"Spell?"

"Yeah. As long as you have this, I have to come back to you. So don't go anywhere and hold onto it for me."

"....."

"We'll rescue Suzaku...and Lelouch too. Wherever he is, I'm sure he's trying to rescue you. He's not the most dependable guy but I can count on him in a situation like this." Then Milly bent over to whisper in Nunnally's ear, "You know, Nunnally, I don't think I've never told you this. So I'll tell you now."

"What is it?"

"I'd like to protect you and Lelouch. Not because I'm an Ashford and not because you guys are a princess and a prince. That doesn't mean anything to me. That's the honest truth."

"Milly..." protested Nunnally.

"So please believe me. Promise me not to leave from here and wait till we come back."

Tears began to pool under the younger girl's eyes. Nunnally wiped them away with her hands and nodded, saying, "Yes. I believe you Milly. I'll wait for you."

"Okay. Good girl."

Nunnally raised her head, smiling as Milly gently kissed her forehead. Even after they left, she could feel the warmth of that kiss. So she guarded Milly's precious notebook and waited. Until suddenly, the door clattered open. Nunnally heard someone enter

the room. Her acute senses picked up something familiar about this intruder. She turned towards the footsteps.

"Is that you C.C.?" Nunnally inquired.

"No it's not," the person responded.

"Um...but..." Nunnally was no longer sure what her feeling had meant. She heard chuckling. It wasn't C.C.'s laugh but that of a young boy. "Nunnally, I've come to take you with me."

"What...?"

"I'll introduce myself later. I might not even need to. After all, this probably isn't the first time we've met."

"Um..."

"Let's go." As soon as he uttered the words, everything went black.

5

The red light of geass shimmered in the critically wounded Cornelia's eyes.

Upon confirming that, Lelouch clenched his fists. He'd finally gotten there. Naturally, Lelouch intended to capture Cornelia and hand her over to the Black Knights. But before he did so, there was something he had to know. There was something he had to ask, not as Zero, but as Lelouch. Right before his death, Clovis had given Lelouch his only lead into his mother's murder. Clovis said the second princess, Cornelia, and the second prince, Schneizel, knew the truth. Lelouch could never ask her for the truth in front of the Black Knights. It was his secret and he didn't want to reveal unnecessary information to anyone.

Lelouch's voice became very deliberate as he questioned the seemingly vacant Cornelia. He was about to hear the truth that he'd been after for seven years.

"Big sister, please answer me," he began.

Cornelia nodded.

"Were you the one who killed my mother?" he asked.

She answered without hesitation, "I'm not."

Lelouch wasn't completely surprised by her answer. Considering the relationship between his mother and Cornelia, as well as what Euphemia said at Shikine Island, he had pretty much deduced that fact. Still, there was another problem.

"You were in charge of personal guard, were you not?" he asked. He meant in charge of her personal guards the night when his mother, Marianne, was assassinated. Although she was in charge of Marianne's guards, Cornelia never directly guarded his mother. Cornelia was the second princess and would never be given such a task. That's not what Lelouch meant. At the time, Cornelia was responsible for managing the entire palace's guards. As well as being a princess, she had begun serving in the army and, thus, had an official assignment. That's what he was actually asking about.

"Why did you withdraw her escort?" he pressed. That was the answer Lelouch wanted most from Cornelia. When Marianne was murdered, for some reason no guards were near her. If they'd been present, they could have prevented the attack...

Cornelia obediently responded, thanks to the nudging of the geass. "Because I was asked to..."

Lelouch's eyebrow furrowed. "By whom?"

"Lady Marianne..."

For the first time, Lelouch's face contorted in horror.

She was asked to do so? To withdraw my mother's escort? Nonsense...

That's like saying my mother knew she would be attacked that day!

No, that's not possible. If she knew she would be attacked, why did she send her guards away? Besides, if she knew, she would have gotten me and Nunnally out of there! Instead, Nunnally got involved in the attack and lost the use of her legs and eyes. My mother even shielded Nunnally with her own body.

"What...?" His voice trembled. Then Lelouch lost his temper and started shouting at Cornelia. "What really happened that day?! Who killed my mother, dammit?!"



Cornelia's mouth opened but no words came out. The geass forced her to answer but she couldn't tell what she didn't know.

"Argh!" Lelouch growled. "You don't know the truth? Then who does!? Who knows the truth? You yourself investigated what occurred that day!"

Cornelia responded, "I remember...His Majesty ordered Schneizel to transport the body..."

"The body...you mean mother's? Wait, then what was in that coffin?" As Lelouch asked that question, his interrogation was cut short.

"Hey, get back in here!" yelled C.C. Her unusually tense voice echoed across the garden from the cockpit of Gawain.

"I know! The government bureau's defense forces will be here soon..." Lelouch answered, mildly irritated.

"No!" C.C. yelled again urgently. "Your little sister has been kidnapped!"

"C.C., this is not the time for jokes. We'll take Cornelia back to the command center as a hostage..."

"I just know because she's the reason you live! They're headed for Kamine Island."

"Kamine Island?" Lelouch repeated. But just at that moment:

"ALL HAIL BRITANNIA!!!" A sudden cry pierced the night sky as something massive exploded through the concrete roof.

"Nooo..."

In a laboratory reduced to a pile of rubble, General Bartley Aspruiro groaned and spurted blood from his forehead. He was surrounded by the large and small remains of the lab's equipment. One such remnant was a massive cylindrical culture capsule, which happened to be lying right next to him. Its resident had literally flown the coop. The person who should have been inside was none other than Jeremiah Gottwald.

"It's a damn disgrace...How can I report this to the prince...?" Bartley moaned, though the incident was not really his fault. The culprit was the power supply.

As the Black Knights proceeded toward the Tokyo Settlement, they broke through a defense line in Atsugi. As a result, a state of emergency was declared in that settlement. Because Tokyo recognized its external power supply could be compromised in the ensuing battle, it sensibly switched over to internal power generators. It was common sense and prevented the enemy from delivering them a nasty surprise later by cutting off their power source. Fortunately, the government had internal generators online a moment after cutting power from the outside. The switch was made under the direction of Viceroy Cornelia.

It was just for a moment.

It must have been really quick. It might have been less than a tenth of a second. However, there was at least a fraction of a second during which the government bureau operated with low power.

Unfortunately, that moment of lower power was the reason the lab lay in ruins. The capsule was filled with culture composed of special elements. They usually couldn't be contained inside the capsule but strong electric pressure kept the solution from expanding. When that electric pressure momentarily decreased, the culture broke free of its containment. The lab techs were caught completely by surprise. Relying on the government to provide the most secure power in Area 11 was a big mistake.

The man inside the destroyed capsule had woken up. He was completely different than the man who'd gone into the capsule. The new man was experimental, artificial...and incomplete.

"It's only his emotions running wild," said one of the lab techs helping Bartley to his feet. "His actions are too hard to predict right now."

Bartley was already perfectly clear on the matter of the awakened test subject. Jeremiah Gottwald had arisen and shaken off Bartley and others who tried to stop him. The man machine

rampaged through the lab with his hyperstrengthened body before escaping with a prototype weapon.

"Argh!" Bartley grimaced though he wasn't sure if the pain was more from his injury or the crushing guilt. "I just wish we could communicate with him!"

But now...Jeremiah Gottwald was unstoppable.

A giant object loomed in the bloodred sky. The stars had twinkled out for the evening and the sun would soon peek up over the horizon.

The object resembled sea urchin. It wasn't a fighter jet. It wasn't a Knightmare either. Its bizarre shape boggled the mind and it was twice the size of Gawain. It was the Britannian army's newest prototype weapon Siegfried, the Knight Giga Fortress. A human figure protruded from the top of the shape, where none of the massive float units were anchored. That person, Jeremiah Gottwald, gazed down on Gawain, where Lelouch was, with exaggerated surprise.

"Zero? Can it really be?!" His arms crossed randomly as if he was conducting a dubious religious ceremony. "Oh, what luck! What fate! What evil fortune!"

Lelouch had already donned his mask but the face of the other was easy enough to see. He asked, "Is that you, Orange boy?"

"Ohh-o-o-ohhhhhh!!!" Jeremiah flipped out upon hearing that hated name, the name of the infamous incident which had landed him on the Empire's bad side. For some time, Orange had been used against him as a mocking nickname.

"Ooooh-ohhh-oh!" his scream continued, like the plaintive cry of a broken record player. Then he clasped his hands in mock prayer and growled in crazed fervor, "I beseech you! I'm begging you, please die."

With an increasing thirst for blood, Siegfried went into battle mode. By then, Lelouch had made it back to the cockpit of Gawain through the auto landing ramp C.C. had lowered.

"Dammit! Get Cornelia!" Lelouch ordered.

"I'm already on it," said C.C.

It would be ridiculous to leave their enemy commander's body behind. Per Lelouch's request, C.C. stretched out Gawain's large hand to Cornelia below. The woman's eyes no longer shone with geass, or with much of anything for that matter. An order like that, to answer, lost its effect in certain situations—the absence of an interrogator for one. Still, due to her grave wounds, Cornelia was still as motionless as when she was under its sway. She passively stared at the approaching giant black hand.

"Hurry!" Lelouch demanded. However, right before the hand could pick up Cornelia, a massive force crashed into Gawain from the opposite direction. Siegfried plowed into Gawain with its whole body and with a blast from its booster, now flew several hundred meters into the air with Gawain plastered on its bow like a bug stuck to the windshield.

"Nngh!" they blurted.

"ZEROOO!" With a manic cry, Jeremiah, who had been outside of his unit, disappeared into the cockpit. However, his ragged cries echoed in the sky. "I must rid the world of the Empire's enemies. Yes...and so, ALL HAIL BRITANNIA!!!!"

Though he could speak, which pointed toward general intelligence, Jeremiah's sentences lacked cohesiveness and his conversations were at best deplorable. Still, he'd already communicated the only thing he had to say—that Zero must die. Despite the fact that he was now a science experiment, the goal of defeating the enemy of Britannia and his own personal nemesis remained lodged deep in his psyche.

"ZEROOO-O-O-O-O-O!!!"

"Get out of my way!" Lelouch shouted as he grabbed the trigger for the Hadron Cannon. With Gawain still pressed against Siegfried, he risked damaging his own unit at such close range but he didn't care.

"Go away!" Lelouch fired.

"Hmph!" snorted Jeremiah. As if predicting the red beam of the Hadron Cannon, Siegfried released Gawain and ascended high above.

"He's very good," C.C. said with surprise. She used the moment to put some distance between her and the other unit, releasing fire from the slash harkens. It glanced off Siegfried. Lelouch snarled and threw down Zero's mask, saying, "C.C., you operate the unit."

Before C.C. had even given her assent, Lelouch grabbed his mobile communicator from his jacket. He hadn't stopped thinking for a moment about what C.C. said. Confirming Nunnally's location ranked a lot higher on Lelouch's list of priorities than fighting the idiot in front of him. He entered a passcode that connected the line to the command center at Ashford Academy.

"Ohgi," he began. "It's me. Now—"

"Zero!" replied an unexpected voice. "Thank god! I'm so glad you finally contacted us..."

"What?" gasped Zero. "Minami? Where's Ohgi?"

"He's been shot! We're treating him now but he's unconscious.

The culprit who shot him is still—"

The report should have been shocking. Although not as distinguished as Zero, deputy commander Ohgi was very important to the Black Knights. Zero's charisma and leadership overshadowed him, but Ohgi's mild and earnest personality won over many comrades. His ability to mediate among factions contributed to the success of the Black Knights as its membership expanded and diversified. He was the reason Lelouch had been able to lead the Black Knights without worrying about or getting involved with petty infighting.

However, Lelouch wasn't thinking about his organization. He only had one thought in his mind at the moment: *Nunnally's been kidnapped*. Though he hadn't confirmed it was true, he could think of nothing else.

"Alright, you'll do," he said brusquely. "Where's the girl in the wheelchair?"

Minami was speechless. For Zero to not even ask about Ohgi or the situation at the command center... Finally, he recovered and asked, "Uhh, isn't Ohgi more important?"

"More important"??

Lelouch bristled at the assumption. "I'll arrange for his replacement later. The girl in the wheelchair comes first!"

"His replacement..." echoed Minami.

It was something he never should have said. Most people who belong to the military or any large organization know that they are only one of many. That isn't to say that people want to be cogs, and Lelouch had carefully recruited the kind of person who wanted to be independent and valued as an individual not a cog. That was an implicit promise offered by the Black Knights' leader, Zero.

"Confirm her location!" Lelouch said. "Hurry!"

It was that very moment that the image of Zero as messiah started to show its first cracks. Lelouch wasn't solely to blame. People tend to expect others to save them, even if they weigh down their savior with an incredible burden. Even messiahs have circumstances and emotions, like Lelouch's concern for Nunnally. No one can be the people's messiah forever. Perhaps it would have been better if the Black Knights, like Tohdoh, had never thought of Zero as their messiah in the first place. Tohdoh saw the relationship as mutually beneficial. Zero used them and they used him. They used Zero like a messiah in order to gain Japanese independence. If the Black Knights practiced that kind of practicality, they might have been able to delay the destruction they were about to face. Hindsight is always 20/20.

Understanding that Zero wasn't going to be any help to him, Minami answered mechanically, "All the students we had confined disappeared in the confusion when Ohgi was shot..."

As soon as he heard that, Lelouch broke the connection and immediately entered the next code. It was not the code for the Black Knights, but for a regular mobile phone.

"Lelouch!? This is a bad time..."

"Rivalz, is Nunnally with you?" Lelouch asked.

"She's in the clubhouse," the other boy said. "We're just a short distance away."

"Understood."

"H...Hey! Wait! Where are you!?"

Lelouch hung up. He couldn't trust that Nunnally was still in the clubhouse if Rivalz wasn't there himself to confirm it. Minami had said that the students had run off, so Nunnally had probably been left alone. If that was the case, then it was possible C.C. was telling the truth.

Lelouch entered the next code into the communicator. C.C. glanced back at him as she evaded Siegfried's attacks.



Suzaku Kururugi was still stuck in Lancelot's cockpit.

It's not like he had any place to go since his Nightmare was frozen in place and enemies surrounded him. However, the Black Knights were having a tough time dealing with Lancelot's armor. The torch barely made a scratch. Some thought they'd need something akin to a bazooka to destroy it. Despite the fact that they were correct, Rakshata would have none of it. Being neither Japanese nor Britannian, Rakshata didn't really care what happened with the battle in the Tokyo Settlement. She'd teamed up with the Black Knights solely to advance her research, not for the sake of their rebellion or anything like that. The captured Nightmare wasn't an enemy soldier to her, but an invaluable research subject. Just because it was their enemy's weapon didn't mean it deserved to be destroyed. She wasn't alone—many among the Black Knights held high expectations for Lancelot. They'd already captured it

without destroying it, so if they could pull the pilot out, they'd be able to add significant firepower to their forces.

"Damn, that's a thick hatch!" exclaimed Tamaki, the Black Knight officer overseeing the actual work. "Wish we had the sword with the rotating blade." The torch was pulled away. Suzaku, watching on his monitor, sighed with relief. It was only temporary, though, as further activity caught his attention.

"Tamaki, what do you want us to do with these ones?" said a Black Knight.

"Huh? Oh, those kids from earlier..." Tamaki said.

"Should we put them in dorms or the gym with other students?" asked the guard.

Students? Suzaku was surprised.

"Call Zero!" Shirley's familiar voice rang out. Lancelot's infrared sensor picked out student council president Milly and Rivalz as well. All of them had their hands crossed behind their heads and guns pointed at them. Lelouch's phone call to Rivalz had given away their location as they hid in some bushes. Black Knights securing the area easily captured them.

"I guarantee you Zero wants us to be safe!" Shirley pleaded. "If not, something's wrong. He's trying to guard us—"

"Aww, shut up!" Tamaki yelled back at Shirley. He didn't stop there. "Zero and me are tight. I know Zero better than anyone. And in a situation like this," Tamaki pointed his gun toward the girl and fingered the trigger, "he wouldn't hesitate to shoot!"

At that moment, Suzaku pushed the switch he'd been avoiding pressing and shouted, "Stop!"

Lancelot's cockpit opened. Like on Shikine Island, only Lancelot's drive system was inoperable. Suzaku could still open the cockpit on his own. He stood up out of the pilot's seat. Tamaki looked up in surprise.

"Oh...what's this? The Japanese knight comes out to help the Brits, huh?" Tamaki mocked. He stopped targeting Shirley and aimed the gun at Suzaku. Suzaku gazed right back, fearlessly.

"S...Suzaku..." Rivalz murmured as Tamaki shouted over everybody.

"That white Knightmare is all we came here to get. A dirty traitor like you can die right here!"

But as Tamaki pulled the trigger, something dark leaped out of a nearby bush. It jumped on the arm holding the gun and scratched Tamaki's face with all its might.

There was a "Mrowrrr!!" followed by an "Ouch!" followed by the rat-a-tat-tat of bullets haphazardly sprinkling the sky. Suzaku remained unharmed. The dark shape leaped off of Tamaki, raised the hair on its back and prepared to make another attack.

"Arthur!"

"Argh, stupid ass cat!" snarled Tamaki. The heroic dark shape was none other than Arthur the cat, who had come to live in the student council room at Ashford Academy. When Tamaki saw Arthur glaring at him with bared teeth, he pointed his gun at the cat. He must have been angrier at his own blunder than at Arthur's interruption. And his anger made him forget the warning from Zero, whom he claimed to know better than anyone. Tamaki always had a short fuse.

"Screw this! Just kill all of them!" Tamaki yelled. But his call was interrupted by the flash of searing bright light. It was a searchlight, not from the school grounds or even from the Black Knights.

"Good evening everyone!" called a cheerful voice from overhead.

"You're kidding!" gasped Rakshata Chawla, as she stared dumbfounded at the "ship" that had suddenly appeared in the sky. "The Earl of Pudding actually came out to the frontlines?"

Lloyd Asplund noticed her too. "Rakshata. I thought it was you..." he grumbled. Though their rivalry was often a cause for jocularity, he was quite solemn at the moment. Meanwhile, a Knightmare launched from the Avalon. It had

the body of a Sutherland, but it was equipped with a float unit and an energy shield like the Lancelot. The Black Knights responded in a panic.

"What the?"

"Fire! Keep firing!"

Stunned as they were, they fired back with their machine guns. Of course, the bullets didn't make so much as a dent in the Knightmare or the Avalon, as both used their shields to repel the fire. The Knightmare opened fire on the Black Knights below with its assault rifle.

"Agh!"

"Retreat! Just pull out!"

Milly Ashford, student council president of Ashford Academy, didn't waste a moment. "Now!" she beckoned to Shirley and Rivalz, who were standing nearby. They began running, but soon came face-to-face with the dark silhouette of a man.

"Where do you think you're going!?" he yelled. The man reached out his arm. Milly ducked under it and kicked his groin with all her might.

"Ouch!" The man moaned and fell to the ground. Shirley was taken aback.

"P...President, that's wild..."

"It's a little trick I picked up for getting rid of suitors you don't like at arranged marriage meetings," Milly said with a wink.

"Can't say that I've ever needed to know that."

"It's never too late to learn a life skill. Now hurry!"

"Y...You got it!"

"Wow. Sorry guy. I feel for you" said Rivalz, as the three students ran off.

"Hey! Wait! Come back here!" Tamaki aimed his gun at their disappearing backs, but before he could fire, the Knightmare landed between him and his targets.

"What!? Bastard!" he yelled, shooting at it reflexively. The bullets bounced off the Knightmare's shield of course. From the

Avalon, Lloyd communicated first to Lieutenant Cecile Croomy of ASEEC.

"Well, Cecile? How are the test parts working out?" asked Lloyd.

"They are ready to be put into practical application," she replied.

The energy shield and float unit previously only manufactured for Lancelot required a high volume of sakuradite to function. Still, if the advancements discovered with the Lancelot could be mass-produced and integrated with Sutherlands and Gloucesters, the investment was worth it, as the military could take a huge step forward. It was even possible that Knightmare combat would be revolutionized. In the monitor, Lloyd nodded with satisfaction.

In the meantime, fire from the Avalon's machine guns scattered the Black Knights on the ground. It didn't take long before the Gefjun Disturber pods surrounding the white Knightmare were hit and destroyed.

"It's back on!"

Suzaku exclaimed as he saw the boot screen load up. He jumped back into his seat and grabbed the control stick. Cecile's face blipped onto the monitor.

"Open up the fuel hatch," she said. "We'll replace your energy filler."

"R...Right." Although he nodded, Suzaku seemed concerned about something. "But...why did you come out here too, Miss Cecile?" After all, Suzaku had ignored orders and their efforts to stop him, and left on his own. He didn't expect to be able to return to them, much less have them come to his aid. Cecile brightened.

"Good question. Why did we Lloyd?"

"Who, me?" Lloyd seemed surprised to be dragged into things, but he too had a grin on his face. Suzaku wasn't really sure what to make of Lloyd...was the man actually embarrassed?

"To recover Lancelot," said Lloyd. "And to do a few other things as well..." As he spoke, Cecile replaced Lancelot's energy

filler and installed a new left arm to replace the one Suzaku has sacrificed against the Guren.

"It's a Sutherland arm," Cecile said. "Is it showing contact?"

"Right. It cleared the compatibility check."

"Good. Then leave this place to us. You go after Zero."

"Um..." Suzaku began. "But..."

"Didn't you come here for that? Regardless of the people who tried to stop you?"

"Ooh, you really hurt me Suzaku! When you return, I'm sentencing you to a full course meal cooked by Cecile."

"...What was that?" Cecile chided.

"Oh nothing. Nothing at all."

The familiar rhythm of their conversation steadied Suzaku. He didn't deserve to be treated so well. It actually made his heart ache.

"...Thank you. Please protect Ashford Academy and everyone at the school."

"Of course. My fiancée is here too! Well, can you hear me my dear Ashford lady? Please be ever so kind as to cooperate with us in guiding an evacuation..." Lloyd's silly voice echoed across the school. Milly, who heard him from her hiding place behind the clubhouse muttered, "I guess he could be reliable after all." Suzaku would have begged to differ.

After its energy was fully charged and its left arm repaired, Lancelot took off. Floating above the school, the sensors captured a small figure on the roof of the club house. It had black fur and shiny golden eyes. It was Arthur, the cat he'd met in town the same day he met Euphemia. The feline had never gotten used to Suzaku, who wasn't very good with cats, but he'd warned to Euphemia quite well.

Suzaku and Arthur quietly looked at each other. For the first time since he'd lost Euphy, a small smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. The moment was interrupted by a communication. This time it wasn't from Lloyd or Cecile. The crest of the Britannian royal family blinked on the right edge of the screen.

"Huh? A royal private channel..."

"Ku...Kururugi...?"

"Viceroy Cornelia?"



"Argh! I can't get through to Nunnally or even Sayoko..."
Frustrated, Lelouch turned off his communicator. C.C., in the pilot seat below him, turned around.

"Lelouch, you know I'm here with you as your accomplice... but also as your ally," she said. C.C. had already helped him out by telling him where Nunnally had been taken. Nevertheless, Lelouch responded brusquely. "So I should trust you? Take the word of a woman who won't give me any reasons?"

"Look, I don't want you to die," C.C. retorted. "At least that much is true."

"Hmph, well that's convenient for you, isn't it?"

For a moment, C.C. looked...hurt? Sad? Lonely? Without debating what it was, Lelouch knitted his brow and scowled. They still hadn't dealt with a certain problem at hand. Siegfried was still on their tail.

"ZEROOO!"

Lelouch noted their position and addressed his ground troops.

"Third squad! Enemy airship! Sync fire and shoot it down!"

"Roger!"

Gawain passed the ground troops and flew between a pair of buildings. The sky was getting lighter and the night was nearly over. As he observed the coming dawn, Lelouch entered another code into his communicator.

One after the other, the Black Knights' Burai were repelled from the walls of the government bureau. As Tohdoh watched them be

destroyed from his Gekka, he groaned in frustration, muttering, "Damn their tenacity! I'd expect that of Cornelia's elite!"

Tohdoh was growing impatient. Five hours had passed since they began their assault and he was no closer to breaching the government compound. He was beginning to suspect that he was up against the knight he'd seen in Narita. The man was young but he possessed a stoic and tactical mind. Most young commanders attacked exuberantly, leaving their defenses lacking. However, whoever Tohdoh was up against, they hadn't shown Tohdoh any weaknesses. Perhaps their commander was particularly skillful with defensive strategy?

Either way, Tohdoh and the Black Knights had invested far too much time in the battle. Neither side had greater numbers or a tactical advantage; they were evenly matched. However, a certain number of the Black Knights squads were composed of civilian recruits. As time wore on, their lack of experience was becoming a burden. Not having won early on made the situation extremely difficult for the Black Knights, because the quality of their soldiers would eventually become apparent. Although Tohdoh issued strict orders, some of the squads composed of civilians disobeyed and even left the settlement to fight on their own. Tohdoh wasted time trying to manage them.

If he had at least three midsize squads, or even one that he could rely on to obey his orders, they wouldn't be in this situation. Much as he hated to admit his uncharacteristic irritability, Tohdoh was pretty frustrated.

A communication beeped into his cockpit. Without even bothering to introduce himself, Zero said, "Tohdoh. From here on I'm leaving all operations in your hands. Ohgi's been wounded. Have Diethard assume his duties."

"Hold on a second," Tohdoh said, smelling a rat. "What do you mean, leaving them to me?"

"I'm afraid there's another urgent matter that requires my attention. I won't respond to any further communications from you."

"W...Wait!" Tohdoh exclaimed in shock. "What could be more urgent than this, Zero!?"

However, Zero had already severed communications. That fateful decision determined the outcome of the battle.

Zero tasked Tohdoh with directing the entire battle's strategy, which was much easier said than done. Only the squads on the frontline were currently under Tohdoh's command. Tohdoh himself was fighting in the battle, so it wasn't like he could go anywhere to oversee the function of the other groups. Besides, the other groups were acting according to the strategy that Zero had established. If Tohdoh gave a command that threw off those strategies, it would only create confusion. Soldiers could only follow one set of orders and one strategy. If they tried to follow two separate ones, the army would no longer be acting as a group. In a worst-case scenario, individual squads might reject Tohdoh's orders, suspecting them to be enemy traps.

Even if Zero was injured and desperately needed to transfer command to someone else, it shouldn't have been to someone on the frontlines like Tohdoh. Command should have been transferred to the appropriately named deputy commander Ohgi at the command center. Critically, Ohgi was injured and couldn't assume his duties. Next in line was actually Diethard, but since he was a Britannian, no one would trust him.

"The seventh squad's been wiped out!" reported a frantic subordinate.

"What!?" Tohdoh gasped.

It had never been clearer that Zero really was the true leader of the Black Knights. His charisma and leadership were truly irreplaceable. Although Tohdoh was an excellent frontline commander and was trusted to a certain degree, the only strategies all the Black Knights truly trusted were those of Zero—their messiah. Tohdoh's influence outside his old subordinates paled in comparison to Zero's. The civilian insurgents who had just joined and the original Black

Knights followed Zero. Without their core, they were brittle and weak.

After a while, the Black Knights strategy became stagnant. They seemed to have lost their mobility. Guilford noticed it too. He pondered it, then issued the careful order, "Zero might make a surprise move. Proceed for now but if the enemy exhibits any strange movements, retreat at once."

"And if no suspicious acts occur, Lord Guilford?" asked a subordinate.

"Then proceed to destroy them. The battle is ours. They've shown us their weakness, so we can't miss this chance to exploit it."

So began the Black Knights' annihilation.



The smell of burned metal told Suzaku everything he needed to know. Under normal circumstances, Suzaku would never be allowed to set foot on top of the government bureau. It was for private use by the viceroy only. Yet, as these were far from normal circumstances, there he stood, in the garden constructed by the former Viceroy Clovis and maintained by the current Viceroy Cornelia.

"This battle situation....bodes well for my forces..." Cornelia li Britannia, viceroy of Area 11, struggled to enunciate through labored breathing.

"Am I clear? Do all you can to hide the fact that I've been wounded. It'll only upset them...Guilford...and the Glaston Knights..." Although she was injured, Cornelia's judgment as a commander remained unscathed. Perhaps that was due to her innate talent, but her years of experience on the battlefield contributed as well. The only tactical blunder she'd committed that day was luring Zero to a place where she could kill him with her own hands. Just as Lelouch couldn't ignore his feelings for his sister Nunnally, so too was Cornelia unable to ignore her feelings for her sister Euphemia. She was only human.

"You're...the only one I can tell..." Cornelia continued.

"Don't try to talk more," said Suzaku. "I understand. I'll get the military medical team quietly..."

"K...Kamine Island..." Cornelia interrupted, not listening. "That's where Zero's headed..." Suzaku gasped as Cornelia continued. "Anymore...It's no use...I can't remember..."

Memory loss?

"Geass..." Suzaku murmured. The cursed power had struck Cornelia as well. The injured Cornelia didn't seem to hear him. The princess shifted her head weakly to look at Suzaku, who kneeled beside her. It might have been the first time she ever looked at Suzaku closely.

"You are...Euphy's knight, aren't you?"

"I!"

"Then you must go...clear her dishonored name."

"Yes..."

She...Suzaku was stunned. *She doesn't doubt Euphemia at all.*

Although Cornelia had to have seen footage of the incident at the ceremony, she completely trusted that her sister would never purposefully perpetrate such an act. Suzaku saw perfect conviction in Cornelia's eyes. *She doesn't believe Euphemia would do something like that willingly. She believes Euphy was disgraced by Zero.* Even Suzaku had been plagued by doubt. But not Cornelia—her bond with her sister was that strong. Suzaku's heart warmed.

Euphy, it's going to be okay. The people you loved haven't lost their faith in you. No matter what others say, we believe in you. Perhaps the way you lived and the person you were makes us believe in you. No matter how the world distorts your memory, your pure light will never die out in the hearts of the people who truly knew you. You didn't do anything wrong. Knowing that, what do I have to do as your knight?

"I know this is a bit informal...but I dub thee Knight of Honor of Britannia," said Cornelia, and as she traced the sign of the cross in the air before his face. "Now...you are a knight in both name and station. Go, Suzaku Kururugi...!"

It was both an order and prayer. Cornelia rejected everything that she believed and the morals she upheld as a Britannian to entrust this boy with her deepest wish.

"Yes, Your Highness!" Suzaku confirmed. He would give his life to follow that order, not as a knight, but as a person who had been touched by Euphemia.

6

Dawn's first light spread tendrils over the eastern horizon.

A black figure flew purposefully over the blue sea. Gawain, and its passenger Zero, narrowly escaped the violent pursuit of Jeremiah Gottwald's Siegfried, and made a beeline toward Kamine Island. C.C. handled the piloting while Lelouch retreated into thought. Since his communication with Tohdoh, he hadn't said a word.

...Nunnally. He could think only of her. If I've lost Nunnally, what have I been fighting for till now? Why did Euphy have to be sacrificed...?

"Kamine Island is in sight," C.C.'s voice startled Lelouch out of his mental diatribe. He glared at the small green island in their monitor.

I'm taking Nunnally back, no matter who tries to stop me!

C.C. landed Gawain at the base of a cliff near a large entrance into the rock.

"We've reached it," she said.

Lelouch had been to these ruins before. He knew that beyond the entrance lay a vast underground chamber, one that spread underneath the island. "Do you have some sort of connection to this place?" he asked C.C.

C.C. shook her head. "Not this one."

"Meaning there are other places similar to this one?"

Lelouch reasoned. "Does Nunnally's abductor have a geass power like Mao?"

"I don't know that much."

Lelouch snorted his disapproval. C.C. quietly looked back at him. "It's the truth..." she said pointedly, as if for once she actually wanted Lelouch to take her at face value. Her look gave him what he needed to know.

"I don't doubt it. We're still accomplices after all."

"Thanks," C.C. said quietly, followed by a louder, "Ugh!"

"What's the matter?" asked Lelouch. At the entrance to the ruins, he saw bands of light crackle and swirl up from the black cavern.

"I see! This is..." C.C. said with sudden understanding. But she was too late to fly away. The bands wrapped around Gawain's feet, binding it to the ground.

"What...?" Lelouch's eyesight blurred. One moment he was sitting there in the cockpit of Gawain, and the next, all the things around him disappeared. He stood midair in the middle of an empty space. He'd felt this feeling before—once when C.C. had made the contract with him and given him geass. The second time was when he had touched C.C. while she was halting Suzaku's Lancelot at Narita.

"Calm down. We're caught in a trap set for intruders. The one who activated it is probably—"

C.C. interrupted her explanation with a scream that rang loudly in Lelouch's ears in the strange space. At the same time, the space around Lelouch changed from blank to a sepia image. Suddenly he found himself looking across a ruined land. Explosions thundered...Flames raged...He smelled gunpowder and smoke. It seemed to be a battlefield, but something was off about it. Tanks crawled and soldiers held rifles. Everything looked old-fashioned, like it belonged in a museum, not a firefight.

"What's going on? Is this...the past?" he asked.

A girl darted in front of Lelouch. Because she was wearing different clothing it took a moment to recognize her. But he could never mistake that long hair and doll-like beauty.

"C.C.!"

The girl jumped into a trench. A soldier in it barked, "Who goes there!?" Before she could even respond, he fired his rifle. The shot split her forehead open.

"Agh!" Lelouch gasped. Then suddenly the world twisted into a new shape and he was greeted with a different scene. Then another. In each scene, C.C. died. He watched as she was killed over and over and over again...

Burned at the stake...

Impaled on spears...

All the bones in her body crushed...

Sliced to pieces by an iron maiden...

Drowned in murky sewage water...

Skinned alive...

The images were too much for anyone to see, the accompanying screams unbearable.

"S...Stop it..."

Lelouch's voice was powerless against the visions. C.C. was tortured and killed by every inhumane method known to man. The visions kept coming one on top of another, like drops of water over a waterfall. Over and over, the girl who had introduced herself as C.C., and had been living with Lelouch, died.

Bright red pieces of flesh scattered. C.C.'s arms and legs were chopped off while she remained alive. Above her beautiful face, eyes wet with bloody tears, the giant weight snapped free from its rope...

"STOP IT!!!!"

He blinked. Everything around him was white again. Because of its purity, he found it arid and cold. He could see his body. And near his body, he saw the back of C.C.. They both were naked.

"C.C. Are these your...?" Lelouch said, petrified. C.C. shook her long hair and turned around, saying, "All I have left are my memories as a witch. I don't even know if I was ever human to begin with..." Though she spoke in her usual emotionless tone, Lelouch read between the lines. Was he able to do so because they seemed to be inside her mind? Her words were no less dry than usual, but this time he heard the sadness deep in the bottom of her heart. Despair and suffering so great that Lelouch couldn't even fathom it tortured her; yet, though she was sobbing, she still reached out to grasp the one wish that was never granted to her.

"Anyone who has ever hated me and each and every one who has shown me any kindness are gone," she said. "They've vanished into the current of time. In the endless flow of existence, I am utterly alone..." As soon as the girl finished, her subconscious cries grew louder in Lelouch's mind.

Help me!

Someone, anyone, please help me...

Lelouch closed his eyes for a second. When he reopened them, they held intense conviction. He gazed at C.C. and said, "You're not alone."

"Huh...?" A sliver of emotion passed over her normally detached face. Lelouch continued, "If you're supposed to be a witch...then perhaps I should be a demon."

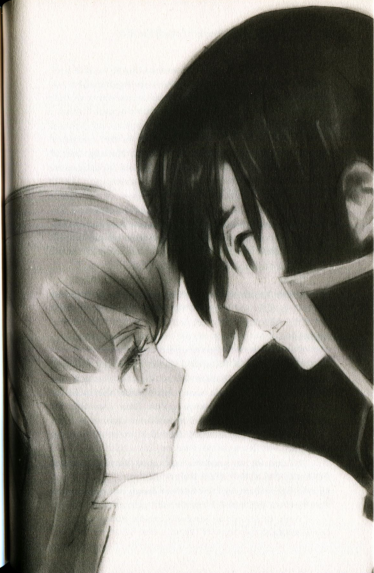
His remark was a bit patronizing, but the sentiment behind his words was what she wanted most to hear. She gaped in surprise. Then suddenly, she laughed. "Odd thing to say at a time like this. Isn't there something else more deserving of your attention?"

"Yeah," Lelouch responded to her casually. "But I told you. You and I are accomplices."

"That's right, and you still have to make my wish come true."

"Yeah..."

"You may be greedy and sinful, but that's who you are Lelouch. You're my accomplice..." C.C. slowly moved closer. As



she did, the density of the world increased, until he could no longer see his or C.C.'s bodies, and all was enveloped in light...

Suddenly, the light disappeared.

Lelouch found himself conscious and in the cockpit of Gawain. The monitors showed no changes. Nothing seemed different about the unit, including his own person. Lelouch pressed his fingers to his temples and asked his pilot something.

"C.C. Are you okay?"

"Don't you know who you're talking to?" she countered. She was back to her normal selfish and no nonsense state. She was like a cat that Lelouch would never be able to train. Lelouch actually cracked a smile—

"It is I!" called a voice from the heavens.

"Ugh!"

A slash harken shot out at Gawain from above. It grazed Gawain's shoulder and lodged in the sandy ground. At the other end of the cable, high in the sky, floated the Knight Giga Fortress, Siegfried.

"Zero! It is time for you to repent!" yelled Jeremiah.

"Stubborn ass!!" shouted Lelouch. Jeremiah followed them all the way to Kamine Island! It made sense, if one thought about it. Jeremiah wasn't interested in the battle for the Tokyo Settlement. Revenge against Zero consumed his manic brain. C.C. lifted off and created some distance over the sea. Still, slash harkens attacked them from every spike of the sea urchin.

"It's time for my wonderful vindication! Waahaaal!" shouted the deranged man. One of the harkens hit home, chipping armor off as it clipped them. Gawain's monitor flashed red, spelling out a warning about the unit's left shoulder and right arm.

"Argh, those are the sections Cornelia damaged before!" Lelouch noticed.

"There's one shot left in the Hadron Cannon," offered C.C. Gawain had expended an enormous amount of energy traveling from the settlement to the island. Gawain wasn't in any condition to battle. Furthermore, it currently wasn't in a very good position. Siegfried had a wide-open shot at Gawain's back. Their mobility might have been equal, but their positions negated that. Lelouch grabbed the trigger for the Hadron Cannon. He fired the last shot not at Siegfried, but into the sea below them. A gigantic column of water and steam rose up in reaction to the intense heat. Gawain jumped into the water to avoid detection by the enemy.

"Isolated! Smaarrrrt!" screamed Jeremiah.

The cover of the water allowed Gawain to reposition itself. Siegfried, on the other hand, charged through the water and lost Gawain. However, their reprieve would only last briefly.

"Leave this idiot to me," said C.C. "You go after Nunnally."

"Ghh! But we're out of energy!"

"It'll be okay," C.C. responded confidently but seemed a bit shaken. "... Well, I'm a little nervous."

"...."

Suddenly, C.C. let go of the control stick and turned around to face a pensive Lelouch. "Win Lelouch!" she said encouragingly. "You have to prevail over your own past. And over the outcome of your actions." As she spoke, she drew closer and closer until...

Their lips met.

"!"

... Could it be called a kiss? Lelouch felt it was something different. It felt more like he was renewing his contract with C.C. It was like a seal on their bond, proof that they were inextricably linked.

Gawain descended onto the nearby beach. Lelouch exited the cockpit onto Gawain's giant hand, then jumped down to the ground. Looking back at the black unit in hesitation, Lelouch said, "Don't die C.C."

She responded with a laugh. "Who are you talking to?"

"You have a point." Lelouch's smile disappeared under Zero's mask. Gawain took off into the air, drawing Siegfried to it.

"I found you!!" thundered Jeremiah's voice over the battlefield of sea and sky. A cynical smile graced C.C.'s face as she said, "You're not my first pick to commit suicide with but..." but she had to prevent him from interfering with Lelouch at all costs.

C.C. jammed down on the control stick. She increased Gawain's speed and charged towards the approaching Siegfried. The two units set off a flurry of sparks into the expansive sky as they clashed.



In the Tokyo Settlement, far away from the island, the battle was drawing to a close.

"Hold your ground! Victory is within our reach!" encouraged one of the Glaston Knights. They had rocket launchers which they fired from over the Gloucesters' shoulders. The Black Knights' Nightmare squad was reduced to dodging the shots.

"We can't hold out!"

"Enemy reinforcements will be here soon!"

The frontline force's formation had fallen apart. Zero's departure from the battle field was communicated to the entire the Black Knights, and as a result, most of the civilian insurgents lost their will to fight. Infuriated as they were with Euphemia's massacre, their natural fear of death flooded back with Zero's mysterious disappearance. They realized they were up against the Britannian army, the same military giant that had awed and oppressed them since the war seven years ago. The civilian recruits screamed, dropped their weapons and fled in fear. And that caused confusion to the official Black Knights, who were already fighting a losing battle against the Britannians. By taking advantage of the areas abandoned by the volunteers, the Britannian army cut off the Black Knights' formation from the side. They cut off

communication between the individual squads and bombarded the remaining Black Knights with cannonry from all sides. Ally units were getting destroyed everywhere.

"What should we do?!" yelled Sugiyama, as he and his comrade Inoue turned a corner in their Burai suits. But before Inoue could respond, she let out a surprised yell.

"Wh..."

Those were her last words. Inoue had been with the Black Knights from the very beginning, all the way back to Kallen and Ohgi's resistance group. Her cockpit was blown away. No one would even find pieces of her body.

"I...Inoue...?" Sugiyama whispered in disbelief. He had been a member of the Black Knights since the beginning as well.

"Where are you Zeroooo!?" he screamed desperately. His cry rang out with shots from his assault rifle, released randomly towards the enemy.

Elsewhere, Tohdoh pressed on against Guilford and Cornelia's elite guard. "Fight to your last breath!" Tohdoh bellowed. "Stop at nothing! Because if they break through here, our forces will completely collapse!!"

However, not even Tohdoh's skills could change the tide of the battle. Following the situation from his post, away from the main thrust of the battle, Diethard muttered, "It's not that Tohdoh isn't a brilliant military leader. It's just that he lacks the incredible charisma Zero possesses. You can't run out on us, not now!"

The destruction would all be over soon.



Lelouch ran through the silent tunnel. The only sound was the echo of his footsteps. No one seemed to be waiting for him in the tunnel. His sister Nunnally wasn't there, either.

Before long, the tunnel came to an end. There was a gigantic door, and in front of it was a massive stone slab like a stoop. He'd

reached the ruins where he'd captured Gayain. Schneizel and the Britannian army had been researching something there.

Lelouch climbed the stone steps and ran to the center of the platform. There he paused, before slowly and deliberately walking forward.

The trap at the entrance was designed to buy time, he thought to himself. As such, Lelouch had been careful not to set off any more traps. It was a little weird that the trap at the entrance wasn't meant to completely shut out intruders. In fact, Lelouch felt he was being invited to go further. Did they want him? Maybe they wanted C.C.

No matter. The first thing to do is make sure Nunnally is alright.

The door bore strange geometric linework. Fortunately, he was able to see the details of the door because the platform was illuminated by the makeshift skylight that Lelouch and the others had created the last time Lelouch had been on Kamine Island.

"!"

Suddenly everything changed.

The sound of a gunshot echoed through the cave. The shot came from the direction of the cavern entrance. It burrowed into the door right next to where Lelouch's hand was. Footsteps followed, then a figure emerged from the darkness, gun in hand. He wore a white pilot suit and had curly brown hair.

"Turn and face me. Very slowly," said Major Suzaku Kururugi, Knight of Honor, Holy Empire of Britannia, Area 11, Britannian Forces Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps.

Dammit! swore Lelouch. Why now!?

"Didn't you hear me Zero?" Suzaku's tone was dead serious. "Turn this way."

Both were silent for a moment that seemed to drag on forever. Then Zero swung his cape and spun around, saying, "Euphemia randomly murdered throngs of innocent Japanese people." Though Lelouch had said possibly the most vile thing imaginable to Suzaku, the soldier didn't so much as lift an eyebrow.

He continued, "You'd fight for a woman like—"

"Your geass power is quite convenient, isn't it?" Suzaku smoothly interrupted. Under Zero's mask, Lelouch's face twisted in rage. Suzaku didn't stop there though. He continued approaching and speaking, gun aimed at Zero all the while.

"You get to hide in the shadows while others take all the blame for your dirty work. You're an arrogant coward. That's your true nature."

Lelouch was speechless. He couldn't believe what he was hearing! Then, without lowering the gun or turning around, Suzaku addressed someone behind him.

"Kallen."

"!"

"Wouldn't you like to know Zero's true identity too?"

Lelouch hadn't noticed Suzaku's approach and also completely missed that Kallen was there. Suzaku, though, seemed to have been aware of it the whole time. A red-haired girl peered around one of the columns that lined the entryway. Like Suzaku, she had her gun out but she wasn't aiming at Lelouch. She had the middle of Suzaku's back in her sights.

A cool bead of sweat slid down her forehead. Kallen Kouzuki focused the entirety of her being on Suzaku's hands. At their slightest movement, she was prepared to shoot Suzaku on the spot.

Of course, that wasn't the reason she came to Kamine Island. Kallen had received a transmission as she continued to fight in the battle for the Tokyo Settlement, even though she was down her radiant waver surger and right arm. The transmission was from Ohgi. Ohgi had been seriously wounded, and when he regained consciousness, he'd been given the unfortunate news that Zero had abandoned the battlefield. And so he got in contact with Kallen.

"Kallen...go after Zero." Though Ohgi's breaths were labored, his voice was full of conviction. "There must be a reason he's acting this way. Save him...Zero...the one who will realize Naoto's dream..."

Naoto. Naoto Kouzuki. He was Ohgi's best friend and Kallen's big brother. Before Lelouch, as Zero, paraded onto the scene, Naoto was the founder and leader of resistance group that became the Black Knights. Ohgi and Kallen both thought of Zero as their best hope but also as the person who'd been leading them in place of Naoto.

Kallen had been ordered to follow Zero but how would she do that?

"How do I find him? Our radar won't pick up Gawain if it's flying in stealth mode..."

"You should...see it soon..."

No sooner had Ohgi spoken than Kallen spied a small figure appear on her main monitor. A white unit was flying at top speed toward the southwest. It was the Lancelot but Kallen couldn't think of a good reason why Suzaku would be leaving the Tokyo Settlement.

"Rakshata...put a transmitter on him...when we captured him..."

"I understand!" she said. "Supply corps! Send a captured air transport to me ASAP! This is top priority!"

That was how Kallen found herself on Kamine Island, aiming her gun at Suzaku's back.

"Kallen." She wasn't very surprised to hear Suzaku call her name. Not as surprised as Lelouch anyway. The soldier's senses were incredibly keen. She fully expected to be noticed when she snuck in. "Wouldn't you like to know who Zero is too?"

Kallen broke her silence to respond to Suzaku, saying slowly "What are you talking about?" Without taking her eyes off Suzaku, Kallen came out from behind the column. To move, she'd lowered

her weapon, and in that moment, it wasn't pointed at Suzaku's back...

"You have a right to bear witness," he said.

"No...Wait!"

She hadn't been careful enough. Suzaku pulled his trigger and fired his gun. But instead of piercing Zero, it glanced off the heavy black mask covering his face. A crack emanated from the spot the bullet hit at the top of the mask. The crack quickly zigzagged down the mask and it split into two pieces, which crashed on the ground. The face underneath the mask appeared.

"What!?"

She knew him. He had the same lustrous black hair and handsome face that drove the girls at school wild. But his left eye was different. Instead of purple, it glowed red. Usually, when his eye was revealed in that condition, what he did next was command an absolute order. But against Kallen and Suzaku, that ability was utterly meaningless. He'd used his geass on both already. Though Lelouch's geass allowed him to order anyone to do anything, it wouldn't work twice on the same person.

"But how...How could you..." Kallen asked in a cracked voice, barely conscious she was speaking at all. Lelouch stood emotionless on the platform before her. Kallen's knees went weak and she stumbled backwards, gun dangling from her limp hands. The scene repulsed her, literally pushing her backward. "Lelouch is...?"

Hearing her voice, the man on the platform smiled modestly, and said, "Yes. I'm Zero. I'm the one who leads the Black Knights, who challenges the Holy Britannian Empire, and who holds the entire world in his hand."

...The world? W...What...?

What is he...What was that man saying? We fought for Japan's independence.

The man on the platform was still smiling. He seemed to pity her dismay and confusion, at least it seemed that way to Kallen.

"Y...You..." she managed in a trembling voice. Her hope wasn't entirely extinguished. "You used us? The Japanese people? You used me...!?" She wanted him to deny it. But her hopes were dashed by his next statement.

"And as a result, Japan will be free. You certainly can't complain about that."

"What!?" Kallen's lips lost their color and tears streamed down her face. Zero's words sliced into her heart. *As a result...result, result...*

What did Ohgi say? He'd said Zero was the one who would realize Naoto's dream. Yes, her brother's dream...

...No.

No. No. No. No. No!

Her brother would never have said something like that! He cared deeply for Japan and the Japanese people. He was kind and diligent, and he protected everyone. *He protected me. He was my only brother...I'm so proud of him...He's so precious to me...*

For a man like this...to take his place...I can't...!

"A...Ahhh...Ahhh....!" Kallen sunk to her knees in despair.



Suzaku glanced at Kallen, who was reduced to tears. He bit his lip, then glared at his "childhood friend," and said, "I should have arrested you sooner."

Lelouch frowned. "You knew it was me?"

"I wasn't sure. So I convinced myself it wasn't true. I really wanted to believe in you..."

That much was true. Suzaku had wanted to believe in Lelouch. Lelouch was very dear to Suzaku. Though some of his memories of Lelouch held difficult and unpleasant things, but some of them were certainly warm. They held precious many of the same people. So Suzaku had reasoned it was wrong to doubt his friend. He shouldn't think like that. Even upon entering the

stage of confrontation where they now stood, Suzaku didn't want to believe it. Even though the mounting evidence forced him to accept the truth, he still wished differently in his heart. He wanted it to be false. He wanted to be wrong. He was praying for it even as he pulled the trigger to shoot the mask.

Unfortunately, he'd been right. Suzaku muttered angrily. "But you were lying to us...To me. To your sister Euphy, and Nunnally!"

"Yes, and now Nunnally has been kidnapped."

"Wh..." Suzaku seemed concerned to hear the news. That was all Lelouch needed to change his tone and speak openly with Suzaku.

"Please Suzaku. Can't we call a temporary truce?" He wasn't speaking as Zero. Suzaku knew that tone. It was the one Lelouch used in school, the voice of his childhood friend. "I need your help to save Nunnally." Those were the same words the young prince spoke on that rainy day seven years ago, the same words he used to implore his only friend, a boy the same age, to help his sister. "There's nothing in the world you and I can't do together!"

It was déjà vu. Seven years ago, Suzaku had honored Lelouch's request. It was the request of his only friend. He'd vowed to always come to his friend's aid, but now...

"Don't be ridiculous!" Suzaku rejected Lelouch's request in three words and aimed his gun at his childhood friend again.

Their paths were too different, and they had opposing obligations. Lelouch's imploring face twisted into one of fury as Suzaku continued, saying, "Had you only joined up with Euphy first, we wouldn't be here. If you and Euphy had combined forces, the world could have been—"

Lelouch's voice changed back to Zero's as he said, "That's all in the past. Over and done."

"The PAST!?" Suzaku exclaimed, livid with anger. *Did he just say what I think he did?* With one word, Lelouch wrote off the death of Euphy. He condemned to the passage of time all the souls

CODE GEASS

コードギアス

反逆のルージュ

Lelouch
of the Rebellion

ALONE

December 2017, Kamine Island

Two hands reached toward her.

Their usual bickering droned on. Nunnally wasn't sure what to do with either of the hands reaching out to her.

"I'm going to carry Nunnally on my back!"

"I told you that wouldn't be safe."

When the boy in western clothes stubbornly insisted, the boy in traditional Japanese garb and carrying fishing equipment retorted, "A beach is hard to walk on. A weak prince like you couldn't handle it."

"Don't call me weak. Besides, I've decided no one's allowed to touch Nunnally."

"It's too late for that now. I've already carried Nunnally lots of times. I even helped her change clothes."

"Wh...What? Suzaku! When did you..."

"I told you Lelouch, you're weak and clumsy."

"Not that! What kinds of things have you done behind my back?"

"Somebody who overheard this might get the wrong idea."

It was very difficult to get them to stop arguing. So Nunnally hesitatingly interrupted them.

...Um, Big Brother...

...I'm really happy you want to help me...but you got hurt because of me before...

Suzaku smiled and Lelouch blushed in embarrassment.

"Ugh...Nunnally, are you sure you're okay with this?"

"Yeah, I am. Suzaku is really strong."

"B...But..."

"Give it a rest Lelouch. Take it like a man! Nunnally likes me more than you."

"She didn't say anything like that! Don't put words in her mouth!"

"Whatever. Here, hold these. Even you should be able to carry them."

"Hmph..."

Frustrated, Lelouch schlepped Suzaku's fishing equipment. For his part, Suzaku carried not only Nunnally but her wheelchair on his back. He certainly had very strong muscles for a ten year old boy.

Suzaku walked delicately with Nunnally on his back down to the beach where calm waves lapped against the shore. Lelouch continued grumbling all the way there. Suzaku leaned towards Nunnally and whispered, "He's a good brother though."

"Oh...?"

"I've never seen anyone get so worked up about a piggyback ride."

Nunnally was confused for a second, but then smiled, "He is."

"Oh, don't tell him I said that Nunnally."

"Huh? Why? My brother would be happy to know you think of him like that."

"No way. That's weird."

"W...Weird?"

"It's better if he gets mad at me."

"Huh...um...Is that so?"

"Yep, it is."

"Hey! Suzaku! What are you telling Nunnally...!"

"You're being a pest! Just shut up and carry my fishing pole. That's my favorite. If you drop it, I'll bury you alive as punishment!"

"What!? Now that you said that, I'm just going to throw it away."

"Hey you dummy! Stop it! Don't you even remember why we're going there in the first place?"

"B...Big Brother..."

But...By now, Nunnally had figured out what Suzaku meant. It was something they had to do. They were Nunnally's one and only brother, and his one and only friend. They argued over her all the time. Though they seemed to be full of animosity, the pair seemed to truly enjoy bickering. It allowed them to say everything they wanted to say to each other and kept it all in the open. In spite of their harsh words, they were accepting each other. They trusted each other. Their bond was so deep and strong that Nunnally felt jealous of it. It was a lifelong friendship.

At least, it should have been...

Though Nunnally was blind, she saw them clearly before her. They were no longer the boys they used to be. Her brother and his friend were together, which should have been a happy occasion...

So, why? Why are my brother and Suzaku glaring at each other? They look as if they're facing their nemesis, or someone they hate more than anybody in the world...

Why is that? They were always together and protected me...

And then, gunshots violently rattled Nunnally's eardrums.

With that blast, Nunnally was pulled back to her body. The world was dark again and she could no longer see Lelouch or Suzaku. But her keen senses immediately picked up that she wasn't in the last place she remembered. She was no longer in the student council room of Ashford Academy where she'd been before, fulfilling her promise to Milly to wait.

"Oh. So you woke up Nunnally," said a familiar child's voice. It was the last thing she remembered before she'd lost consciousness.

"Who are you?" she asked. "And where am I...?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," chuckled the boy. "I didn't mean to swing by here but I thought I could show you something interesting in this place."

"Something interesting...?" she asked.

"Hmm..." the boy pondered playfully. "Well, that blast might have ended the battle. I'd have liked it better if they kept going. But they didn't seem to have everything they needed to continue. That's just how it is."

Nunnally didn't understand what he was saying. He didn't seem to be talking to her anyway. However, his footsteps grew nearer. When they stopped in front of her, Nunnally sensed his hands stretching out to her. "Um..."

"Now, let's be on our way again Nunnally," he said.

"W...where are we going?" she asked.

"Where else?" he said, laughing again. "To the world..."



The silence was so deafening that the voice was weak and barely audible.

"You...shot him?"

"Yeah ...I did," responded a low, cold voice.

The past had been painted over, the present lost its meaning, and the future became a blur.

A new era begins here...

CODE GEASS
コードギアス
反逆のルージュ
Lelouch
of the Rebellion

Afterword

W

hat a relief! Somehow I was able to wrap everything up in this volume.

Oh, I should tell you what I mean. There's a standardized number of volumes allotted for the novel adaptation of an anime. Basically, for anime shows that start in the fall, approximately three paperback books are standard. How-e-ver...

Including the first novel, set all in the past, there are five volumes of the *Code Geass* novels! "Red Miracle," currently being serialized in a magazine, will be the sixth volume...

That's too many (LOL)! It's twice the standard length. Since I couldn't expand any more than this, I'm relieved that this volume contains up through episode 25. The first collected edition of "Red Miracle," which stars Kallen, will be printed soon. If you think you'd be interested, you better check it out! (I'm supposed to contribute a decent-length story to it as bonus content that didn't appear in the serialization.)

Anyway, the novel adaptations are finally finished for now. On this occasion, I'd like to share with you my thoughts on the memorable events of each of the volumes. I don't want to bore you, so I've written just a little bit on each volume.

"STAGE-0 ENTRANCE"

This volume was a so-called flashback, but I never intended to write about the past for the entire volume. I just meant to

write the flashback as the prologue, and then proceed with the main story. Yeah, I ended up doing that overall but the prologue ended up the length of a whole volume! It's difficult for me to write about those three (Lelouch, Suzaku, and Nunnally) in their childhood because I can't stop writing about them. (LOL)

"STAGE-1 SHADOW"

In this volume, I was really excited because I got to introduce a bunch of female characters—C.C., Madam President, and Cecile. I hadn't got to introduce a lot of female characters yet, and there were lots of characters I wanted to write about.

"STAGE-2 KNIGHT"

This one gave me the most structural problems. I'd decided early on to cut Mao from the novel adaptation. However, there were several foreshadowing events during his arc that I needed to leave in for the development of the story. Finally, we decided that we couldn't cut the story of Mao completely from the novel and it was included. By the way, I call that portion, "Nunnally, the damsel in distress." (LOL) I don't know how to explain it, but she's the kind of character who makes the other characters around her act like princes.

"STAGE-3 SWORD"

I was originally planning to include up through episode 22 in this volume. However, I realized that none of the volumes so far had a happy ending. The kind of endings I was forcing on these books were like, "The war has begun," "He was captured by Lancelot," or "Aha ha ha ha." The final volume wasn't going to have a happy ending either. I thought we should have at least one volume that ends happily, and so I altered my initial plan.

"STAGE-4 ZERO"

Like with all the other volumes, I had a hard time fitting all the episodes into this volume. Although this is a tangent, when I visited the dubbing studio, I was surprised by the length of the recording sessions. They were perfectionists, and thus achieved what they wanted. That visit helped shape the vividness of the characters in this volume.

Lastly, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to my staff, who have helped me once again in creating this volume, and my fans who read this book.

Hope to see you in the next volume, "Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion—Red Miracle."

January 2008
Mamoru Iwasa

CODE GEASS
コードギアス
反逆のルージュ
Lelouch
of the Rebellion

Commentary by Yukana, voice of C.C.

...*M*y breath is white...

Usually the intake and exhale of air from my lungs can't be seen, but it can be in this season. I don't mind this season. Although it's full of trash and debris, I appreciate city air because it allows simple vapor to appear white.

It's beautiful because it's not clean.

Hello. I'm Yukana, the voice of C.C. in the anime version.

Apologies for beginning my commentary like that. I was remembering the time during which we recorded the contents in this volume. As I write this commentary, feeling winter's chill around me, it's overwhelming to realize that almost a year has passed since our studio work. It brings back memories of when I would go home from the studio, still inhabiting C.C.'s character.

I've been assigned the important role of writing commentary for the final volume. As you know, I'm not a writer, so I'll just write from an actor's viewpoint as naturally as I can.

I've been grateful since the beginning for Mr. Iwasa's sensitivity. I've always felt that his passion and dedication to the world of *Code Geass* went beyond his job. It might sound arrogant, but actors mentally identify with their characters and the works they're in to

some greater or lesser extent (at least I do.)

We love our characters and rampage through their world at full speed. That's something happy and enjoyable, but also sad and lonely.

My character is inside of me, but also not me at the same time. That's why I often feel we are holding ourselves.

That's why I'm so happy. I feel like someone else beside me is protecting something important to me.

Thank you very much.

Since Mr. Taniguchi described his original idea for the novel as "picaresque romanticism," we already know that it's a story of good and evil. However, it is difficult not to point out one of the key elements of this work, which is also one of the most likeable: "What is good and evil?" Since the story was a picaresque romance, the protagonist is evil. If we empathize with the protagonist, we will be thinking about things through the vantage point of evil. It wouldn't be strange to classify those who disagree with that vantage point as harmful. In this novel, there are clearly two views of the government and the anti-government groups. What happens when those views are placed inside characters?

The title informs us that Lelouch is the protagonist. Therefore, the story should favor Lelouch and his comrade's character development. You may wonder why I'm stating the obvious. Because, if that's the way it's supposed to be, then why do we sense a variety of viewpoints in this series? It's because each character has their own opinion based on their personal values and is living out their motivations and role. In other words, this story consists of many characters with unique personalities and histories, each capable of carrying the story. Especially in this novel version, the story is mainly told from Suzaku's viewpoint—and as a result, from the viewpoints close to the government's one, including the views of Suzaku, Euphy, and Cornelia.

From an enormous amount of settings, episodes, and information, several pieces are being materialized in this novel. I think that's the reason why it provided understanding, discoveries, and satisfaction not only for us, but also for everyone who watched the anime version intensely from frame to frame. Each character used a different thought process to transform justice to injustice and evil to good. We sometimes may feel guilty being observers of the process. (By the way, let me add that my opinions in this commentary do not necessarily reflect my values in the real world.) I believe some of your might have thought, "I was misunderstanding (character) all along." It might just be that your own subjectivity changed. That's what I'm talking about—justice is subjective.

What Diethard gets from and is attracted by in Zero is described in the story as "a subjective world" and "your justice." In other words, the justice described in this story is relative and that means absolute justice does not exist. Zero's justice requires enormous sacrifices. Suzaku's justice is also destructive. Even the justice Euphy believes in is rooted in colonialism and denies the rights of some individuals. Many TV shows and films choose not to express any other justice than the protagonist's justice or that of other main characters, but this story aggressively expresses many different types of justice. It runs the risk of being too divergent, and having that negatively impact the story's cohesiveness. Mr. Taniguchi and Mr. Ohkouchi's confidence and challenge in the original story is reflected in this choice. I guess their confidence in this story comes from their deep knowledge of the world.

...Oh, I'm out of space to continue. There's so much more I want to write about, but I guess I will have to continue some other time, some other place...

I hope you're looking forward to the second season beginning this spring.

Yukana as C.C.

CODE GEASS: Lelouch of the Rebellion

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CODE GEASS

コードギアス
反逆のルージュ

Lelouch

of the Rebellion

STAGE - 4 - ZERO

In order to spare Japan from suffering the Holy Empire of Britannia's oppression, Princess Euphemia creates the "Specially Administrated Zone of Japan." In this zone, the Japanese are allowed to govern themselves. The public's elation turns to shock when during the opening ceremony, Euphemia orders the extermination of every Japanese person. Due to Lelouch's haywire Geass, the place of celebration turns into a mass graveyard.

Is this the will of God, or the work of the devil!?

This concludes the novelization of
CODE GEASS SEASON ONE!



ISBN 978-160496185-0



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反逆のルージュ
Lelouch
of the Rebellion

STAGE - 4 -
ZERO

Original Story by
ICHIROU OHKOUCHI / GORO TANIGUCHI
Written by
MAMORU IWASA

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STAGE - 4 - ZERO



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